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ACCENT
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WALLACE FOWLIE:

Claudel and the Problem of Sacred Art

Despite the high praise of Charles Du Bos, who calls him the greatest genius of the west today, and despite the judgment of Jacques Madaule, who compares him with Dante, Paul Claudel still occupies a place in literature and in Catholic thought which is vigorously disputed. At the beginning of 1953, he was in his middle eighties and still appeared as belligerent as ever. He has maintained not only his full powers of writing but his violent temper as well and his animosities. His detractors are legion. But his admirers come from many varying beliefs, religious and political and aesthetic. He has received homage from such writers as the Catholic academician Louis Gillet and the communist Aragon, from the Protestant Ramuz, and the humanist Jean Prévost, from Alain, Maurice Blanchot, Claudine Chonez. The difficulty of his art, and the need almost of meditating on it in order to follow its full meaning, explain to some degree the long period of neglect. Only since the second World War has there been any marked effort to understand Claudel and to define his position in contemporary art.

He was born in 1868, in Villeneuve-sur-Fère, a small village in Le Tardenois, a locality which lies between the provinces of Ile-de-France

and Champagne. As a child he learned to observe all the details of the countryside. He has written of the natural spectacles he watched from the highest fork of an old tree he used to climb. This was the site of his first dialogues with nature and his first impressions from which he has drawn throughout his life. The *lycée* in Paris, Louis-le-Grand, was for young Claudel a prison, a stifling atmosphere he has described in *Ma Conversion*. Camille Mauclair has recalled the sullen voice of Claudel at the *lycée*. The boy would speak only in order to argue with their famous teacher Burdeau.

These were the years when, in company with other young intellectuals, he read Baudelaire and Verlaine. But the first great revelation to Claudel, of both a literary and a spiritual order, was Rimbaud. He has described in a passage justly famous and justly disputed the seminal and paternal action which the reading of *Les Illuminations* had on him. He first came upon some of the prose poems in the June issue of *La Vogue* of 1886. This reading constituted for him a release from what he called the hideous world of Taine, Renan and the other Molochs of the 19th century. *"J'avais la révélation du surnaturel,"* he wrote to Jacques Rivière. Rimbaud was the human means for Claudel's return to his faith. This acknowledgment is couched in such hyperbolic terms that many critics have wondered whether Claudel in his letters to Rivière hadn't deformed the real facts. A recent critic, Ernest Friche, believes we can accept this claim of Claudel, provided we realize that the conquest of Rimbaud was a revelation and not the imparting of a philosophy or even a system of aesthetics. Certain sentences of *Une Saison en Enfer,* such as *"Nous ne sommes pas au monde,"* never ceased reacting on Claudel in revealing to him the real significance of his own revolt. Claudel was, not unlike Rimbaud himself, a revolutionary, a Dionysian ecstatic.

The poet has recorded that, in the same year of 1886, a second event befell him which was to fix his destiny. On Christmas day, in Notre-Dame, during the service of vespers, he experienced a spiritual awakening, a revelation of faith which was never to be impaired or endangered thereafter. In describing this conversion, Claudel speaks of its suddenness and of the perception he felt of Divine Innocence. This mystical experience was followed by four years of bewilderment and struggle to harmonize the new force in him with his former self. He began a study of the Bible, the history of the Church and its liturgy, and discovered that what he had once studied as poetry was indissolubly associated with religion. He attended frequently Mallarmé's

Tuesday evening gatherings and learned from the master and the gentle teacher of symbolism how to look at the universe as if it were a text to be deciphered. In his later, somewhat severe article on Mallarmé, *La Catastrophe d'Igitur,* Claudel does demonstrate his debt to the older poet.

At the age of twenty-five, he left for Boston to serve there as vice-consul for France. This marked the beginning of a long diplomatic career which took him to many parts of the globe. In China, where he went in 1895, Claudel entered upon a period of solitude and silence and meditation. His studies centered on the Bible and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Not until the recent book of Ernest Friche, *Etudes Claudéliennes,* has the preponderant influence of Saint Thomas on the French poet been pointed out. Friche calls Claudel a Thomistic poet. In an important letter, Claudel himself confirmed this influence. "I read and annotated the two *Summas,*" he writes. "It was a wonderful nourishment and training for my mind. These lessons transformed me and merged with all my creative activity."

To Rimbaud's doctrine on the power of poetic language, and to Mallarmé's doctrine on the symbolism of the universe, Claudel added the gigantic synthesis of Saint Thomas and the religious interpretation of metaphorical language. At the end of the century, when Claudel returned to France from China, he was practicing the patient metaphysical discipline he had learned in St. Thomas and which he had fused with the early examples of Rimbaud and Mallarmé.

As ambassador, Claudel represented France in Tokio, Washington and Brussels. His diplomatic career kept him away from France and literary groups. His travels helped to make him into one of the most universal of the French writers. He is as familiar with the Greek tragedies, with the Latin poets, with Dante, as he is with the Bible. The repertory of his interests and studies is unusual for a French writer: Chinese theatre, Italian painting, Japanese poetry, Spanish culture, Dutch painting, English Catholic literature, some of which he has translated. The last years of his life have been spent in Brangues (in Savoy). He has come to Paris for the new productions of his plays: for *Le Soulier de Satin* in 1942 and for *Partage de Midi* in 1948.

As a writer, Claudel never made concessions to his public or to his publishers. The Catholic world in France and outside of France has been slow to accept him. When he presented his candidacy for the Académie Française just before the war, he failed to win the election. Not until after the war, in 1947, was he invited to become a

member. His attitude toward the world of letters, and even somewhat toward the world in general, has seemed hostile and almost vindictive. His implacable seriousness has discouraged any sense of humor. In his temperament of stubborn peasant, he has been compared to Péguy. And yet Claudel has participated willingly and joyously in every aspect of the Catholic revival in France: in art, Thomism, liturgy. His visible disdain for many of his contemporaries and for the younger writers has not prevented his influence from deeply affecting the lives of some. His early correspondence with Jacques Rivière revealed his exceptional powers as apologist and defender of the faith. The publication, in 1949, of the correspondence of Gide and Claudel was an event of capital importance. This exchange of letters belongs primarily to the realm of apologetics and criticism. Other exchanges of letters in this century have reflected perhaps more succinctly than most literary forms the spiritual problems of the age: the correspondence between Jacques Rivière and Alain-Fournier, between Rivière and Claudel, between Gide and Francis Jammes.

The letters of Gide and Claudel comprise the most recent dialogue between two opposing voices, a form which is distinctly favored in France. Du Bos once called the great French dialogue that between Montaigne and Pascal, the skeptic and the believer, a dialogue which he says each Frenchman maintains in himself. Such a dialogue as that between Montaigne and Pascal, or between Bossuet and Fénelon, or between Gide and Claudel, is a manifestation of the critical spirit. The Frenchman listening to it prefers not to take sides, not to sacrifice one for the other.

Claudel, the man of severe faith, is opposed to Gide, the man of restlessness and voluptuously felt inquiry. On the one hand, we read an expression of exultant joy, of a peace declared to all men. And on the other hand, we read the narrative of an endless search for happiness, sought in all forms of pleasure. The correspondence reveals, what was already known in its general lines, the tremendous dialectical effort Claudel made, between 1900 and 1926, to convert Gide to Catholicism. Whereas the letters of Claudel show his complete thought on the subjects discussed, those of Gide have to be read in conjunction with the entries in his Journal, written at the same time, in order to follow his mind accepting and rejecting almost simultaneously. Claudel is a vociferous catechizer, but his correspondent is reticent and cautious. This dialogue, which ended in 1926, is one of the most vehement and engrossing in the history of French literature. Although not many

years have passed since it ended, it can be read now publicly as the most recent example in France of Pascalian apologetics to which the contemporary Montaigne said a seemingly definitive "no."

Gide often gives the impression in his letters of playing hide-and-go-seek with Claudel. And yet his attitude cannot with justice be called hypocritical. If he could write as boldly and frankly as a Montaigne, he was quite timid in speech. The physical presence of Claudel inhibited him. After their meetings together, Gide would write in his Journal the arguments he had not been able to articulate.

The Catholicism of Paul Claudel is impressive and majestic. He is a poet speaking with the force of lyricism. He communicates his exultation. The answers of Gide have their own formal beauty, their own careful refinement and reticence. Even after Gide confessed the secret of his life, Claudel continued to exhort and preach. Whenever Claudel spoke from the viewpoint of dogma, there was almost no reaction from Gide. By nature, Gide could not be touched by the scholastic concepts which form most of the intellectual argumentation of Claudel. Claudel's temperament led him to describe the modern world as if he were a mediaeval man enlightened by scholastic ontology. Gide's temperament was fundamentally suspicious of any such massive construction of the mind. Much of Gide's work, written after his debate with Claudel, was to represent a secularization of the Gospels.

By his strength, by the proportions of his work, by his attitude toward the Creation, Claudel towers above his contemporaries. Because he has remained outside of all literary coteries, his presence today has been felt as a force isolated and unique. Every object in his writing is stated in terms of its meaning, of its role. The humblest things he can name are signs in much the same way that the characters of his dramas represent their salvation. When he says: "Divine Joy is the one reality," it is not difficult to believe that Claudel's fundamental approach to literature is different from others; different even from the method of Rimbaud and Mallarmé to whom he owes so much.

It is quite possible that the term "drama," in its fullest sense, never applied to the French theatre until Claudel began writing his plays. Tragedy and comedy, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, were strict forms in France, adhering closely to the Aristotelian precepts and the classical models. Victor Hugo in the 19th century attempted to create *le drame* by fusing the comic and the tragic. The formula he worked out was weak. Claudel created a dramatic form which is unique in French and which bears close affiliations with the drama of Shake-

speare and Lope de Vega. His drama is not a combination of the comic and the tragic. It is a work of one piece and one texture. It is simultaneously speech of the theatre and poetry of language.

His characters speak with the voices of real men and women who feel that humanity forms one body in that each man is responsible at every moment of his existence for all other men. In each scene of his many plays, we have the impression of following some aspect or other of one of the most difficult and mystical dogmas of all: that of the communion of saints. For Claudel the universe is total at every moment of every man's existence. Every story he undertakes to unravel he finds to be an anecdote or an element of the same drama of man which is continuously unfolding in the world. Claudel has spoken of the "passion of the universe" which he feels, and of the exultation he derives from contemplating the millions of things which exist at the same time. *"Que j'aime ce million de choses qui existent ensemble!"*

His greatest play, *Le Soulier de Satin,* is at once one of the most complicated plays ever written and one of the simplest. The three principal characters form one of the most familiar plots in the history of the theatre: an aged husband, a young wife and a lover. Behind the personal relationships of these three characters, Claudel has developed the historical drama of the Renaissance and the destiny of Spain. Even if dates and events are deliberately juggled with, one has the impression of watching the birth of a new era, of seeing a new world emerge from the mediaeval world of St. Thomas. Rodrigue and Don Camille are types of conquerors and adventurers of that period. Their quest is as deeply spiritual as it is materialistic. An obvious bond joins them with more modern adventurers, such as Rimbaud and T. E. Lawrence, with travellers like Guillaume Apollinaire and Claudel himself.

In the Claudelian conception of drama, the relationship between man and woman and between man and God is an eternal relationship. If salvation is the goal of each human existence, love is the means for reaching this goal. Lovers, in Claudel's plays, appear as potential mystics. In *Soulier de Satin* and *Partage de Midi,* he presents a case of love so total that it would seem to exclude love of God, and yet Claudel believes so deeply in the identity of all love that he would say: human love, as it grows in intensity, will end by seeing what it really is.

In these two plays especially, Claudel has re-examined the problem of human passion. The questions about the fatality of passion, asked in such works as *Tristan, Phèdre, Manon,* are reiterated by Claudel:

the meaning of passion, the reason for human love, the reason for its particular force, its destructiveness, the Christian attitude toward it, its spiritual meaning. Claudel's answers to these eternal questions, or at least his comments on them, form a significant aspect of his work which has not yet been fully realized or measured. These two dramas in which he considers primarily the problem of human passion are violent in terms of the mystery surrounding the problem.

He calls woman, in *Partage de Midi,* the promise which cannot be kept. *("La femme est la promesse qui ne peut être tenue.")* She is not limitless, and yet man's desire, his longing, is infinite. The need for the infinite, which is at the basis of human love, is always being deceived by the limitations of love. It must be remembered that Claudel is not speaking of conjugal love in either play. He is quite literally and with unusual boldness studying the kind of passion analyzed previously in *Tristan, Phèdre* and *Manon.* Claudel's fundamental thought seems to be that a human being cannot be the end or the satisfaction of another human being. The beauty of such human love is all the greater if there is an absence of satisfaction. There are no human means for reaching this satisfaction. As soon as a man is separated from the one he loves, he yearns for death.

In all the many versions Claudel has written of his best known play, *L'Annonce faite à Marie,* he stresses this mystical paradox of human relationships. It is particularly clear in the prologue, the scene between the young girl Violaine and Pierre de Craon, the builder of cathedrals. The bonds uniting these two are as mysterious and as strong as those uniting Prouhèze and Rodrigue of *Soulier de Satin.* Pierre loves Violaine and she represents for him everything he is called upon to give up: woman, happiness, the world itself. His love scene is actually his scene of farewell to the world. This opening dialogue contains the whole meaning of the play and what lies beyond the play, because it analyzes the secret role which every Christian is called upon to play in the world. It is the role of pilgrim, the one who accepts the idea of separation. A kiss usually binds two lovers, but the kiss which Pierre gives to Violaine at the end of their scene is the sign of their separation. He has guessed the real meaning of her vocation. She is the victim who combines heroism with humility. Her example is the morality of the play and of all of Claudel's plays. If it is true that the world has no value by comparison with life, then the ultimate value of life is in its capacity to give itself. Pierre, as mason, architect and builder of churches, and the other characters in

the play discover their vocations in accord with the seasons and the earth. Violaine stands apart from them all, in that she represents the symbol of eternity within time, of spirit within matter. Her vocation in the play itself adds a further dimension to the characters around her. By her existence she reveals a meaning in those close to her: her father and mother, her sister, her fiancé and Pierre de Craon.

Violaine is the type of mystic who represents for Claudel an analogue with the poet. Although the goals of mystic and poet are different, many of their activities and disciplines bear striking resemblances. For certain degrees of knowledge the poet has to reach a deep inner silence, a freedom of the spirit, a detachment. This necessary stage precedes the real function of the poet who is by definition the maker of something. He is creator not in the sense that God is, who is able to create out of nothing. The poet is creator out of what the world provides. Claudel, coming after Baudelaire's important lesson on *Les Correspondances,* has stressed this need of a collaboration between the artist and the world. A poem begins when a relationship is perceived.

The metaphor, according to Claudel's *Art Poétique,* is the new logic of the universe. It is the joining of two things which are different. This is possible because no one thing exists alone. Any one object exists only by its relationship with all other objects. This fundamental belief about the metaphor makes it easier to understand why the work of Claudel always seems the continuation of the same piece or the same poem. The poet's language maintains a constant relationship with the Creator. The metaphorical language of the poet does not explain anything, but in it everything becomes explicable. *"Tu n'expliques rien, ô poète, mais toutes choses par toi nous deviennent explicables." (La Ville)*

Claudel feels that the world is constantly asking the poet to find a language by which itself can be expressed. From the universe, man is constantly seeking some explanation for his own existence. In the miracle of the metaphor, a kind of answer to these two questions is reached: a reason for the world and a reason for man. In his doctrine on the poetic word which transmits an image of the relationship of things, Claudel's debt to Rimbaud is obvious. The world is limitless in its relationships and the poet, in his role of conqueror of the poetic word, becomes reader of the world and decipherer of its relationships. The two most widely separated terms of the metaphor are for Claudel the world and God. In making poetic speech the means of joining these two extremes, he was applying logically the dual revelation

which came to him from his early reading of Rimbaud and his religious experience of Christmas, 1886. Even in the physical conquering of the earth, in the apparent materialistic drives of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, there is a deeply spiritual reason. The ambition of the poet, in his will to know the world, is not unrelated to the ambition of the conqueror.

During the last twenty years of his life, Claudel has not published poetry or plays. He has spent his time writing his reflections and his meditations on Holy Scripture. These works form not only an epilogue to a long career of poet and dramatist, but a continuation of it. The active contemplation which was always an element in Claudel's earlier books simply became the exclusive element in his studies of the Bible.

He had always claimed that Rimbaud had been one of those explorers of the 19th century who were consecrated to learning something about what the creation is, what it signifies. The basis of symbolism is a belief that each thing in the world has a meaning which will be revealed to the poet who is able to understand it. Claudel received this belief in the universal symbolism of the world almost as a mission. After learning how to read the universe, he has been learning how to read the poetry of the Bible in a similar method of deciphering. He has brought to the words of the sacred writings the same reverent attention he once lavished on the material objects of his world. The poet of *Cinq Grandes Odes* and *Corona benignitatis anni Dei* has become the fervent and meticulous reader of Isaiah and Saint John.

His most recent book, *Paul Claudel interroge l'Apocalypse,* is a clear demonstration of his method and his belief in symbolism as the key to our knowledge concerning Divine Truth. His work is a testimonial against the literal or scientific exegesis of Holy Scripture. In his treatment of the symbols of St. John, Claudel assumes the role of prophet and man of God whose mission is to speak in the name of God. Such an examination as Claudel undertakes is no mere game of numbers or erudition. His effort is vigorous and consecrated and inspired. This book was composed during the darkest months of the last war (it was completed in December, 1942). The temporal catastrophes were seen as relative from the viewpoint of the real Apocalypse, which for Claudel is a spectacular drama of all times in which we all have our parts. The *Revelation* of St. John ceases to be the mysterious book of the Bible during the course of this interrogation of Claudel. He transposes it into a work of surprising reality.

The seriousness of Claudel's religious sentiment dominates all else in his work. It lies at the source of each poem and play and essay, and it pervades all the developments. Whether the subject is specifically religious or not, the tone and the lyricism are religious because, for Claudel, the poet is at all times the servant of truth. In a letter to Jacques Rivière, he maintains that art is a pale duplicate of holiness *("l'art n'est qu'une pâle contrefaçon de la sainteté").* Claudel is bent upon discovering the deepest meaning of his personal experiences and of all of his varied experiences with the world. Religious art, in the narrowest sense, is concerned with the mysteries of religion, but in its broadest sense, with the mysteries of the world. For Claudel, the divine is constantly intervening in the life of man. This certainty can never be exhausted by words or by poetic inventions.

We learn very early in life that there is a mortal part of human nature which one day will be swallowed up in immortality. The arts have never ceased proclaiming this immortality, and in a profound sense they have never ceased proclaiming it in the service of religious belief in immortality. Approximately at the same time that we learn about the inevitable change our mortal nature will undergo, we also learn that an intense apathy endangers the vitality of every perception we have and of every virtue we may possess. By the creation of art man is able to endow his perceptions with a form of immortality. Most of our perceptions pass by rapidly and disappear into a void. Our incapacity to hold them is cause for sorrow and nostalgia. Art, precisely, sets up the goal of preserving the highest moments of perception.

Many of the most serious of 20th-century artists have been concerned with providing their works with an aesthetic justification. In the field of painting, for example, Braque has made theoretical pronouncements of considerable importance. Others, while not contributing any writing as massive as Delacroix' *Journal,* have spoken at times with conviction and acumen: Picasso, Matisse, Rouault, Masson, Severini. In literature, the achievement of Marcel Proust is the masterful way in which he combined his novel with the analysis of its origin and its meaning. Joyce, Mann, Gide, Valéry have all striven to propose a work and at the same time the aesthetics of the work. The five great odes of Claudel open with one entitled *Les Muses,* inspired by a frieze of the nine muses the poet had seen sculptured on a sarcophagus. The ode is a kind of poetics dealing with the poetic act, with its birth and its function.

On many points the theories of Claudel converge with those of Proust, and behind him, with the tenets of impressionism and the theories of Ruskin. These artists and theorists believe that each time a new original artist arises, the world is recreated. He is able to confer immortality on what has no duration, a man's perception of the world. Aesthetic truth is not the same as scientific truth. It is not based on direct observation or exact notations. The reality of the world for an artist is his vision of the world. It is a particular universe not seen by other men until it is put in the form of art. The public is ignorant about art or indifferent to new artistic creations. But each work will create its own posterity, and finally that work will reveal the temper and the soul of the period in which it was created.

Universal love is expressed everywhere, not only in nature, but in the creative works of art, in paintings, poems, cathedrals. Real things of the world cannot be possessed save in the form of eternity which art creates. In the making of the poet's metaphor or the painter's metamorphosis, the artist is the man who changes the names of things and the forms of things in order to establish a greater contact with them, a purer contact of intimacy. The modern artist, whether he be Claudel or Proust, Rouault or Picabia, is greatly concerned with the relation existing between the recreation of art and the reality of the world. Metaphor and metamorphosis are signs of the sovereign freedom of man's mind to substitute one element for another, to substitute what we usually call reality for its spiritual state.

We watch existence move by us in a series of scenes and pictures. Most of them disappear and sink into oblivion. Our personality is constantly being formed by time and eroded by time. A profound distress comes to us from our incapacity to hold on to scenes of happiness and perception. The objective of art is the elucidation of those scenes which are habitually so elusive and fleeting. In his very act of creation, the artist explores the meaning of those original impressions and fugitive sensations. The difference between works of art is not so much the divergence of technique as it is the qualitative difference in the ways the world appears to various artists. Art alone is able to show us how the universe appears to some one else.

It would be difficult to find another contemporary artist whose religious belief or philosophy is as much the object of controversy as the principles and forms of Claudel's art. He has been equally attacked on the score of his Catholicism and on the score of his art. Lasserre, one of the most vehement critics of the French poet, states that Claudel

rejected the heritage of the Renaissance and embraced an archaic mediaevalism. He thereby, according to Lasserre, repudiated all philosophical reflection and progress, and separated himself from the central tradition of French literature. Frédéric Lefèvre, one of the earliest ardent defenders of Claudel, argues on the contrary that the humanism of the Renaissance was reactionary and Claudel's main glory is that of having resurrected mediaeval humanism.

The controversy over Claudel, when often the very principles of modern art are at stake, is particularly significant when both sides are held by Catholic writers. Henri Massis, who follows strictly the theories of Pierre Lasserre, believes that the aesthetics of Claudel are not in agreement with the principles the art is trying to demonstrate. Massis finds in the subjective lyricism of Claudel an incommunicability and a disorderliness which are contrary to the spirit of order and discipline and hierarchy consistent with the Revelation in which the poet believes. The original apostolic fervor is sacrificed, for Massis, to the hermetic quality of the work. This attack is obviously levelled at the school of symbolism as well as at the specific art of Claudel. In the solution of such a controversy, granted that a solution may be reached, it would be necessary to consider the difficult and tortuous rhetoric of Claudel as the poet's expression of man as he is, of man as contradiction, torn between the demands of the flesh and the spirit. It would represent Claudel as the modern poet who has achieved a synthesis of the aesthetics of Rimbaud and of St. Thomas Aquinas.

It is difficult to dissociate the work of a Christian poet, such as that of Claudel, from the teachings of the Church on art. These teachings through the century are not dogmatic as are the teachings on morals and theology. They emphasize different points in different periods because of the characteristic art of the period. But the great doctors of the Church and the mystics appear in agreement that there are, generally speaking, two ways to God.

The first is usually referred to as the "way of signs." Nature and all the myriad parts of the physical universe are, in this sense, signs. Our sensibility in seeing and hearing them, yes, and in smelling and feeling them, confers on them an intimacy which may be religious. All the manifestations of art created by man represent a further and more complicated development of this same communion between man and the world capable of being apprehended by his senses. Art is the stylization or the extension of nature by means of an emotion expressed significantly. Liturgical art differs from other forms of art only in

being consecrated and used in the manifestation of something the artist considers a mystery in the world. The Christian dogma implicit in this belief is that of God as Creator of the universe. The world created by God may be an instrument of sanctification. The very nature of man, which moves from the physical to the spiritual, parallels the nature of the universe and its spiritualization in art. Nature is as full of signs as the Bible is, whether we are looking for a symbol of the human soul or a symbol of Christ's mystery. There is no more separation between the sensible and the intelligible than there is between the body and the soul. This "way of signs" is based upon a belief that God is immanent in his universe and in his creatures. St. Francis of Assisi expresses this immanence of God in his poem usually called "Canticle of All Creatures," in which he addresses his brother the wind and his sister the moon. Dante uses the figure of the beloved as guide to the summit of Paradise — Beatrice, who is the Christian counterpart of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*. Giotto's celebration of the world in his paintings and Rouault's studies of clowns and prostitutes illustrate the "way of signs" and the immanence of God in his creation. Claudel stresses the importance of the "immense octave of creation" in the drama of his conversion.

The other way to God leads beyond signs. In this far more ascetic way, nature is avoided, art is rejected and even liturgy is rejected. The belief upon which this way is based is the transcendence of God. St. John of the Cross is the great doctor of this way which leads beyond the sensual world and the power of the intellect. This second way, when it is really reached, lies beyond the first, but it is often lost sight of for its caricature, usually referred to as Jansenism — or a pessimism such as Pascal experienced at times. Man is called upon to remain in the "way of signs," where nature, art and liturgy may guide him, until he is able to move into the second way without encountering any of the specious forms of the "way beyond signs."

Catholicism during the 19th century in Europe developed into a particular form in the dominant social class, the bourgeoisie. It was a Catholicism far more moralistic than spiritual, far more Jansenistic than purely Christian. It must be remembered that the Jansenistic spirit is on the whole hostile to art. The ideal of the bourgeois Christian was an ideal of personal perfection, of personal success, rather than a love of God, a love of the sensible world and the creatures of the world, a desire to understand history and great works of art. During the first fifty years of the 20th century, some of the leading Catholic

writers — Bloy, Péguy, Bernanos, Mauriac — have attacked, in their novels and polemical writings particularly, the ideals of the Catholic bourgeoisie. It will be evident in time that they participated in a profound revolution of Christian values, to which the achievements of a poet like Claudel and a painter like Rouault contribute monumentally. Claudel's closeness to his peasant ancestry and his imperviousness to any Jansenistic influences help to explain the quality of joyous praise his entire work reflects and the precedence which the spiritual takes over the moral. He calls himself a *"rassembleur de la terre de Dieu"* and the earth he calls a text which teaches jubilation.

Both the Catholic writer emphasizing a polemical message (Péguy, Bernanos) and the Catholic artist (Claudel, Rouault) have revealed an exceptional desire to illuminate for the contemporary world the mystery of that dogma which is primarily concerned with jubilation. It is the mystery of the communion of saints which teaches the universal solidarity of all the souls who have been born and who will be born. In this mystery, suffering and evil are given a mystical meaning by the supernatural hope which envelops the world and which is constantly struggling to efface the memory of sin. Claudel sees history in the image of a single unbroken sentence unfolding throughout time until it reaches its final period.

Claudel's parable on Animus and Anima may well have been written to explain the lesson of analogy or relationship. It is the marriage of the mind and the soul. Anima brought a good dowry to her husband Animus. But he is difficult in his vanity and tyrannical ways. Anima does not like to oppose him. She had very little schooling, whereas he knows a great many things. He has many bad traits. He is unfaithful. He spends his time at the cafés while she cooks. One day, by chance, he hears her singing. An unusual and wonderful song. He pleads with her to sing it again, but she refuses, and this time she does not give in. He tries to trick her and pretends to leave. But he hides behind the door. Then he hears her sing again and realizes that the song is addressed to his wife's Divine Lover. Animus is the part of us which divides and separates and analyzes. Anima is the part which unites and makes us one.

Her song is the poetic word which Rimbaud had talked about: a veritable instrument of discovery for the creation of a new being. The state of poetry is that state of pure receptivity. The poet hence becomes a medium and poetry a magical means of seizing the ineffable. Poetic language is no longer an expression. It is a sign. A poet is put

into a state of communication as his words come to his lips almost obsessively. Claudel had before him the example of Rimbaud, and especially of Rimbaud's poetic failure.

The parable of Animus and Anima is Claudel's version of the struggle of opposites for existence, a struggle which has been explained in some form or other in every period of history, by every major thinker. Father d'Arcy uses Animus and Anima to explain Eros and Agape. The terms lend themselves to many pairs of opposites, both general and specific: male and female, romantic and classical, life and death, egoism and self-sacrifice, the conscious and the unconscious, the limited and the unlimited, Dionysos and Apollo. Denis de Rougemont, in *L'Amour dans l'Occident,* analyzes the dark romantic passion in the poetry and music of *Tristan* as a memory of joys of the unconscious and as a conflict between Dionysos and Apollo, between egocentrism and self-sacrifice.

This celebrated pair, Eros and Agape, or Animus and Anima, appear under countless names. The interpretation of Jungian psychoanalysis defines anima as the center of the irrational and the unconscious, the abode of the dark passions and instincts, the archetypes of both aggressive and seductive forces. Anima, on the conscious level, when freed from the control of reason, is usually referred to as romanticism. Whatever hope it feels in the force of love, on this level, declines into melancholy and the murkiest forms of mysticism. On the highest level, as interpreted in Claudel's parable and in Henri Bremond's *Prière et Poésie,* anima seems to signify poetic or mystical knowledge. Animus is the surface self *("le moi de surface, le 'je' qui s'agite à la circonférence de l'âme,"* p. 114). Anima is the deep self *("le moi profond profond, qui s'unit aux réalités, qui recoit les visites de Dieu,"* p. 114).

In this parable of the two selves, it is obvious that harmony does not always exist between animus and anima. The temptation of animus is the love of self which may weaken the love of God. And the temptation of anima is, in the romantic sense, the excessive emancipation of the deep self and the resulting contempt of self. Love, when it becomes a frenzy, sings the *Liebestod* which is the song of the death instinct. When ideally married, the deep instincts of life and death should produce happiness.

Claudel's visit to Notre-Dame on Christmas day, 1886, prefigured the important precept of his faith that man has to will to go to God and find his joy in that encounter. On this point, he is opposed to

anything pantheistic or subjective in religion. The divine is outside of us, existing whether we believe in it or not. A life of action and expression is necessary in religion. The creation of the poetic word is the poet's action. A poem is a testimony, an apologetics consented to not merely by the reason of the poet, but by his sensibility and his entire being. The unity of the world is perceived by the experience of love which provides us with an imperfect and often tantalizing *contrefaçon* of unity. Everything has its meaning in the world and everything can be sung of by the poet. At our birth we enter into a secret pact with all beings and all objects. The mission of the poet is that of pointing out our relationships with all the realities of the world.

Claudel's Catholicism has an impassioned fullness and vitality we associate with the Middle Ages and which had to a large extent disappeared in Europe with the early Renaissance. It is a belief in the Church as representing an interpenetration of all of man's needs. Differing needs but not contradictory. The *Odes* of Claudel express a joy in contemplation of the world and in spiritual contemplation which has its best counterpart in the French Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals. When the moral and theological system of Christianity left its manscripts and pulpits, it showed its symbolized face in Gothic architecture to the multitudes. When the four animals of the Evangelists appeared in stone, a new world of animate forms invaded the capitals of columns and the tympanums of doors. The Church became a storehouse of wealth, a theatre for the people, an ark large enough to house all the inhabitants of the city on market days, feast days and days of penance. The cathedral combined all the tender human myths with the Christian belief in the supernatural. Gothic sculpture became an image of freedom in its depiction of angels and prophets, of birds and vinebranches, of strawberry plants, clover, thistle, watercress, fern.

The appearance of Claudel's poetry in the 20th century is not unlike the appearance of the Gothic cathedral in the 13th. They are comparable in their depiction of the ever-dying and ever renascent forms of the world. In them, symbolism and theology are bound up with life. The mediocre types of churches which have been built during the past century and a half testify to the spiritual defection of modern humanity. The poetry of Claudel is a reminder that artistic creation at its best is concerned with human realities and that sacred art, if it is painfully deficient in architecture, reaches paradoxically its height today in writers who are not always fully accepted by the Church, Bernanos and Claudel, and in painters like Rouault and Matisse.

The basic assumption of the Christian faith is the belief that each individual soul is the creator of its own destiny. This kind of creation is not unrelated to the aesthetic creation of the poet. Christian life has to be lived in a very real way if it is to support a vital and creative sacred art. This happened during the few centuries when the Gothic cathedrals were built. But today the writings of Claudel reach a very small segment of the Christian world. The question of sacred art is always a question of spiritual renascence in the world of which today there are only scattered and fragmentary examples. But the fact that the art of Claudel is being gradually recognized by the Church is significant. The Church has always preached that she is the last universal community where all the authentic works of man will be welcomed and preserved. The theological doctrines about Christ stress the close relationship in Him between divine truth and human truth. Any artistic creation which renews the expression of human truth is bound therefore to testify at the same time to divine truth.

Perhaps the greatest lesson which Claudel has bequeathed our age is the belief that the truth of art always tends naturally toward the sacred. To this extent, the term "renascence of sacred art" is justified. The chapel of Matisse at Vence, in southern France, illustrates this contemporary hope. The conversation between the aged bishop of Nice and the aged painter, who is not a practicing Catholic, revealed a similarity of inner spiritual life in the priest and the creative artist. The synthesis between art and faith which was so remarkable in the Middle Ages and which is just beginning to reappear, depends upon the inner life of man, on a certain quality of his soul, on silence, poverty, solitude, nobility.

The sanctuaries recently erected at Assy, Audincourt and Vence appear as original and new as did the odes of Claudel when they were first published, and as the clowns and Christs in the paintings of Rouault. The same kind of accusation has been leveled against these particular examples of Christian art as against modern art in general. Judgments of men who speak with authority in matters of sacred art have been colored with harsh words, such as subversion, ignominy, aberration. These judgments are directed not only against painters like Matisse, who is a non-believer, but against Rouault as well, who belongs to the great tradition of Christian painting, of stained-glass makers and mediaeval illuminators.

Through the 19th century there was no meeting or no discussion between a church prelate and a major painter. There was no inter-

change between the Church and a Delacroix, a Corot or a Cézanne. Yves Florenne designates as the greatest religious painting of the 19th century that of the Chapel of the Holy Angels in Saint-Sulpice and claims that it was a pure accident! Sacred art is one of the last symbols of the freedom and the universality of the Church. The creation of art, when it is significant, is always extreme, but the Church lives habitually in accord with the extreme. It is curious that she has kept at the portals her two patriarchal artists today: Claudel and Rouault.

There is no one authoritative treatise on aesthetics from the Christian viewpoint. In the 20th century, men like Thomas Gilby and Jacques Maritain have tried to cull from the voluminous writings of St. Thomas Aquinas a sufficient number of precepts which might form the basis of such a treatise. The *Art Poétique* of Claudel, and all of his writings, for that matter, substantiate and illustrate what perhaps can be called Aquinian aesthetics.

For the Thomist, the problem of the aesthetic revolves around our knowledge of the concrete. The concrete is the field of experience, the center of poetic knowledge as opposed to rational knowledge which is always general and abstract and conceptual. Our deepest desire is to know the real, and in this sense, the aesthetic experience may be the quieting in us of a persistent craving. The world itself, in its very immediate reality, provided Claudel with an inexhaustible supply of impressions, pictures, customs, colors, words. He is the type of universal artist interested in every culture, every mythology, every landscape. All instances of human life and activity, all aspects of nature, all laws and all forms of knowledge, are open to the poet. But the only material the poet uses is the word, in which Claudel claims there is a secret virtue which the poet alone is able to master or at least use to its fullest capacity. The word, as used by the poet, is not the conventional sign as used in prose and ordinary speech. It is a rhythm, able to recall the thing it stands for, able to make that thing present and real, able to restore it to its existence. The poet's function for Claudel and the Thomist aesthetician is the calling up of the world to its primitive reality by means of the human voice, of the words in rhythm spoken by a poet's voice.

The poet's art parallels therefore the fundamental continuity and development of the world. At each moment in time the world is renewed. The artist works in an extraordinary perception of this principle of perpetual change, development, renewal of the world. We often have the faulty impression of leading our own lives in our own

way. The truth is that our lives are always crossing others, that no one thing or being is isolated from the others. We are part of an intricate pattern, of an inexhaustible set of correspondences. The creation of a metaphor is the poet's new design or composition in which two opposite existences or things are joined.

If Thomistic doctrine states that our deepest desire is to know the real, it also states that a thing may be more loved than it is known. St. Thomas believed that although we can love God perfectly, we know him imperfectly. This problem of love-knowledge is central in Thomistic philosophy and in Claudel's aesthetics. God's will alone is able to give existence to concrete things. They are created by love, which is God's work. And then they may be experienced by love, which is the artist's knowledge of them. At this point, the philosopher is careful to point out that it is not the mind of man that knows, but the entire person who knows through the mind. Perfect knowledge, characterized by wholeness, exists only in God. Man's union with God in beatific vision would be the only perfect union of love, but the dynamics of love, in its desire to effect a union with the thing loved, has relevance to the experience of poetry. Claudel writes that the world is still intact and virginal as it was on the first day of creation. Man is able to know the world because he is a part of it. He himself creates the agreement, the concord which is the object of his knowledge.

The relationship of the poet to his poem is comparable to the relationship of God to his universe. The basic assumption in Claudel's aesthetics is the universe seen as the mirror of God and man as the mirror of the universe. It is not diffcult to move from this point to the belief that the revelation of the meaning of the world which the poet gives is expressed in the arrangement of words. The poem is not the abstract essence which may be derived from the words. The poem is the concrete reality of the arrangement of the words. The new meaning of the world lies precisely in the specific creation of the poet which is his arrangement of words.

Here the parable of Animus and Anima seems to apply to the poet's recreation of the world. The surface self, the animus, is constantly composing words into clear, simple, intelligible notions. But these are not the words of the poet. They are the words spoken by anima, from the deepest part of his being. They are obscure to the poet himself until they are uttered. They are characterized by a greater totality, a greater wholeness than the words of ordinary speech.

MARIANNE MOORE:

Two Fables of La Fontaine*

The Town Rat and the Country Rat

In this ancient parable,
Town rat proffered country rat
A fashionable meal
As a change from this and that,

Where on a rug from Turkey,
A feast for two was ready.
Fond fancy alone could see
The pair's joint ecstasy.

Fine food made each's plate replete —
More dainties there than greed could paint,
But as they were about to eat,
Noises were heard; the pair felt faint.

At the door, sniff and smell.
What was scratching steadily?
Both frightened ill, half fell,
Then fled confusedly.

When they had dared to reappear,
In seclusion with relief,
The city rat resumed, "My dear,
Come now, divide the beef."

— "I have dined," the field-rat said;
"Be my guest, pray, a day hence,
Though you'll not find, I am afraid,
Similar magnificence.

* By permission of the Viking Press (to be published in April).

Yet I'm never in danger: I've supped,
Carefree from year to year;
And so farewell. What is good cheer
Which death-threats can disrupt?"

Man's Ingratitude and Unfairness to Fortune

A merchant had at last attained prosperity.
Despite typhoons, his ships were always fortunate;
Rocks, reefs, and whirlpools had not made sport of his freight.
Fortune seemed to grant the man immunity.
Though sea and ill fortune made others' trips inopportune,
It would seem that his cargoes were always immune;
Fate seemed to steer his goods ashore with special care.
His sugar, cinnamon, tobacco, had had sale
    At his price; and imports of chinaware.
Fashion's and folly's gold were his steward's despair,
    Showering as in a fairy-tale;
Double ducats the smallest change he'd accept.
Coaches, fine. His hounds and his horses each a prize beast:
    His fasts were like a wedding-feast.
When a friend admired the sort of table he kept
And said, "What about this fare? There is nothing daintier,"
The man replied, — "Why not, I am a connoisseur.
What I do is well thought out. With too much to impound,
I balance chance with fact; then my judgment is sound."
But pondering gains made him covetous;
He hazarded once more what he had set aside
And this time nothing came of unjustified pride.
    He had been too impetuous.
A stiff breeze sank goods stowed with inexperience;
One good galleon lacked guns which he'd failed to afford,
    And sea-robbers clambered aboard.
    A third that had docked with mischance
Excited no interest; idiosyncrasy
    And taste had changed to indifference.
    He was cheated whatever the circumstance.
Since passion for building made spending too free
At the same time that he was plucking every fruit,

He found himself destitute.
His friend, observing him in this distressing plight,
Asked, "What could have been the cause?" — was told, "Misfortune,
Alas." He said, — "Bear it; you've one consolation;
Say you've failed; sound judgment gained, can serve you aright."

Such words aren't gratefully received!
Each takes his own part when his goods can't be retrieved.
We think we have earned our prosperity
And if a thing we've done results disastrously,
Misfortune was our injurer.
It is typical of man.
We think we wrought our gains; misfortune wrecked our plan;
She is always to blame. Man is always unfair.

HOWARD MOSS:

Animal Hospital

(For Dick Wilbur)

Uncomprehended pain,
More savage and more sad
Than ours, waits while the rain
Outside is wet with God.
Inside, the choking lights
Panic the pawned eyes
Of cats and dogs and birds
Who wait for the light to die.

Brute shadows on the wall
Are silhouettes of dogs;
And crazy birds call
Through their dwindling fogs,
And let a feather fall
And let a song begin
In a jungle in the hall
In a zoo of pain.

Luck having lost to life,
The cat, our subtle friend,
Meets murder under the knife;
If it could comprehend
The charity of the brain,
Its claws would sever rope
And clinging there, insane,
Butcher the heart of hope.

One eye on the cuckoo clock,
A love bird, once blue-green,
Now drab, with rotted beak
Suffers the chloroform,
And lets a feather fall
And lets a song begin
In a jungle in the hall
In a zoo of pain.

These in the dark, dumb,
Lie where they cannot speak;
Premonition will not come,
Heaven will not awake.
Into the black they go,
Stiff in their witless skins,
While we at the end know
The whole taking in.

All loss is human then,
Even animal pain;
It takes away the sun,
It swallows up the brain,
And lets a feather fall
And lets a song begin
In a jungle in the hall
In a zoo of pain.

SANFORD EDELSTEIN:

Three Poems

I.

The stars winked the moon blushed
and the zebras conversed about the
weather
It was a fine day for the
horse to return wearing stripes
of combat and service
The stars
winked like a forgiving father
the moon blushed took the frolicsome
zebras to her breast and they
called her mother
It was a fine
day for the forest to discover the
joys of the pasture one zebra
thought it would rain he was banished
from the circle
The stars winked
the moon was enchanting the once
upon a time horse dreamed of a greater
transformation
It was a fine day
for becoming a giraffe when the
weeping willow mated with the hyena

II.

Do away with the sentry guarding
the wall do not let the castle
know we are coming
Such is the
death of the impersonal victim
to die without cause to bleed
without honor

And we trample
silently through the night are
we planning a light-hearted "surprise
surprise" or a pernicious
murder
Such is the life of
intense pleasure to murder in
jest to weep at our pleasure

Two lights burn behind the moat
a pleasant wind points our passage
toward the castle
The Queen
opens drawers in his counting house
the King paces the floor of her
chamber

III. "Forbidden Games"

Whose little dog is that it rests
stiff in the earth but not in
peace
Whose little girl is that
Mommy and Daddy are dead the cross
on her little dog's grave is a double
crossed peace
To die alone is to
live alone alone not in peace
the dead cannot rest the little
girl cannot rest until insects
animals people (people!) are
company for the dog and accompany
the dog toward its peace
The owl
on the rafter will live a hundred years
wise old owl keep this song sacred
for a hundred years
Tonight in
the farmhouse a little girl dreams
a moth circles the lamp caresses
the flame and a little girl screams

JAMES B. HALL:

Metropolitan

This place is sales
A space enclosed by walls
An office bordered by promotions:
But once in rain our cheeks touched and bruised
When my car skidded and one balding
Tire proved guard rails only guard
The curve's defection.

No matter now
For Love came to Accounting
Unpackaged there, and even the office
Boy squeezing his pimples at the washroom mirror
Knew: yet though tethered and reviled
Our bruise closed with fruition in this
Malicious centering.

In sickness or
In health therefore I
Take thee to where our scarecrow
Lamps shall frighten peepers — but our In-Laws'
Shower gifts surround and bind us
While a mouse tail quivers towards his trap
For food, libation.

CONSTANCE PENDERGAST:

The House on Gerard Street

For years now Miss Victoria Thibault had existed quietly and with dignity in the old house on Gerard Street. She and her brother Raoul, orphaned at sixteen and fourteen respectively, had been uprooted from a somewhat haphazard childhood in New Orleans and replanted with haste in the puritan soil of an Ohio town founded by New England pioneers. They were given over, without ceremony, "bag and baggage," into the keeping of a great-aunt, a spinster also named Victoria Thibault, who belonged to that side of the family which had emigrated north shortly after (there were those who said during) the War between the States. Vulgar and new-rich their Southern kin called them among themselves, but not for anything in this world would they have said such a thing to outsiders of those who bore the name of Thibault (whose ancestors were river pirates but let that pass). When Thibaults had for generations now been marrying the finest flower of French, of English, of Southern aristocracy, they could afford to have new-rich relatives and go queer in the head!

Great-aunt Victoria lived alone in the house on Gerard Street in what was then the most fashionable section of town. Or rather not wholly alone, for she employed a deaf and dumb Irish housekeeper who, for fear of being accosted on the street by a man, never went out without swathing herself in veils Eastern fashion. The great-aunt kept canaries — all over the house — in rococo cages. The orphans first glimpsed her as a little old woman, framed in the doorway of her house, who leaned upon a heavy cane with a curiously carved gargoyle's head surmounting it, while from inside the house, from every opened window it seemed, came the varied chirpings and twitterings of birds.

In the course of a short time they learned other things about the old woman: that she wandered in the garden each day in meditation upon the great philosophers. It was her policy to take one philosopher a week — beginning with Plato and going no further than William James (though eventually just before her death she included Bertrand Russell) and to wander among the roses in contemplation of his ideas. Later only tiger lilies watched her slow and painful descent, only tiger lilies heard her arrogant responses to the questions of

Socrates. She disliked flowers, couldn't abide them — insults added to injury, she called them, Deity's ironic warning to man, and as for people she preferred "the eternal and unchangeable companionship of Ideas to the vain and idle folly of human relationships."

The children rarely saw Deirdre, the housekeeper (who bore no resemblance to Deirdre the desired and the beautiful of the legends), for, devout Christian that she was, when she was not attending to her household duties or eerily fading in and out of the streets like a wary ectoplasm, she kept to her room, stationing herself for hours at her priedieu, bolt upright on her knees with the martyr's predisposition for suffering as she told her beads, even in prayer finding it safer to have to do with another woman.

This then was the atmosphere into which the orphaned Thibaults were suddenly projected. They were, it is true, sent to school and to church, and Raoul was given painting lessons while Victoria was subjected to reading Italian with a very dull old man who whistled through his teeth. This completed their formal education and for the rest they were forced to listen to excerpts from the Symposium on Love at the breakfast table, to learn by rote whole passages from the Poetics of Aristotle and to question the arguments of Hume and Spinoza.

The uprooting took place at a crucial formative period in their lives. Victoria, just turned sixteen, was beautiful in a quattrocento Florentine way with long light green eyes and clear, rather transparent skin taut over wonderful bones that had never come from the Thibaults, whose bone structure did not show in their large rather flabby faces. Yet if one looked closely at this beautiful, secretive and rather odd girl one saw that the long green eyes were empty and that it was, rather than mystery, a kind of sweet stupidity that curved the corners of the Botticelli lips. This at least was what the great-aunt saw. In Raoul, on the other hand, she caught a glimpse of something fine and hard and very ancient, immutable. The boy will do something, she thought. He has imagination. What she didn't see was that he had too much imagination. The climate of a Midwestern industrial town did not prove to be the most suitable for the flourishing of Art. And Raoul, his dream momentarily interrupted by the journey from New Orleans to the house on Gerard Street, retired in haste, after two sessions of the Symposium and the singing of canaries, into that comfortable grey land of his imaginings, taking refuge in its mists and the warm pale lights that encircled him there. Thirty years later he was, despite his appearance, the boy of fourteen, dreaming for hours

over thin sheets of parchment upon which he wrote with exquisite care in a beautiful, fine hand the letters of the alphabet or sometimes with even greater deliberation would copy out such sentences as "The quality of mercy is not strained" or "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day," having hunted them out from some locked and cobwebbed chamber of his mind. "Absent thee from felicity a while," and then directly underneath, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party." He taught penmanship in the local business school and, going through the shabby streets between the house and the school day after day, four times a day, he was oblivious to the shouts of small boys playing football, hurtling past him to intercept a pass or kicking the ball across his path, did not even hear the hawkers crying their wares, "Ap-ples! Ap-ples! Ap-puls!" nor the women calling in Yiddish from one porch to the next. He walked with his head bent, his face partly buried in a soiled woolen muffler, his mind and soul wrapped in a warm grey dream.

And Victoria Thibault, "young Victoria," as she was still called (although the great-aunt had been dead for several years), having lost her warm Florentine beauty, still dressed and talked as the girl of sixteen, still read Italian (by herself now for the old professor too was dead), still reacted violently to the philosophers — any philosopher — went to concerts when they came to town and to meetings of the Women's Auxiliary and sat serenely in the house on Gerard Street among the bric-a-brac and the photographs of long-dead relatives that reproved her mournfully from their silver frames. As untouched, as virginal as ever, she managed still to affect an air of trembling expectancy. Her life from the time she first arrived at the house on Gerard Street to the windy night twenty years later when the old great-aunt died (resentfully because this was her Spinoza week and she had much to refute) had proceeded at a slow and tranquil pace, uninterrupted by any of the larger issues. She was a thing complete in itself; she wanted nothing, it seemed, but to be allowed to go on following the familiar pattern of gardening, church-going, and doing a few dignified good works. And then the very day of the funeral something happened which was to disturb forever her easy peace.

The funeral was to be held that afternoon and the house was ready, waiting. The parlor had been transformed into a kind of conservatory and the air was heavy and rich, dizzying with the smell of the flowers that covered the piano, the tip-top and the pie-crust tables (Was this

malice or absentmindedness on young Victoria's part?), that reposed on the mantel, the floor, and lined the seats of the bay windows. For two days now neighbors who had disliked or ignored or laughed at the great-aunt had been solemnly arriving with flowers, roasts, and the kind of desserts that are popular at church pot-luck suppers. Beyond closed glass doors the body of Great-aunt Victoria lay in state with candles at her head and feet while yellow birds in gilt rococo cages keened over her.

Victoria was dressing in her room. She was alone in the house, for Raoul, taking special pride in the fact that he had never missed a day, had gone to the school. The doorbell rang and, patting her hair nervously, she went tiptoeing down the stairs. Her visitor had at one time been the great-aunt's legal advisor; he was also an active member of the vestry. He looked flushed, twirled his hat in his hand, and she had the impression that he had been drinking. Whyever in the middle of the day like this, she thought, those green eyes widening in surprise. It occurred to her that perhaps Ramsay was an alcoholic and this excited her oddly.

He followed her into the library, stumbling over the rug, bumping against a chair, exclaiming sharply "Damn!" — then, "I beg your pardon, Victoria."

"The funeral," said Victoria, settling herself comfortably on the sofa, "is to be this afternoon."

"I know. I've been out of town on business, you know. I just got back and just heard, heard right after I got back, that is, or I would have come before, you know. But I wanted to ask was there anything I could do, Victoria — that is, I know Lamson, Bowlby and Bowlby are handling —" He stopped to swallow awkwardly. In a vase there were some red peonies in full bloom and the petals fell like drops of blood on the hearth, but the room itself and Victoria both seemed strangely bloodless and pale.

"Would you —?" said Victoria and gestured with her head toward the closed glass doors.

"I — ah — excuse me, with all respect — came to see *you,* Victoria — ah — my dear."

Poor old soul, she thought, amused — so red in the face, such a great clumsy animal lumbering about. What can it be? "Dear old Ramsay, do sit down. You look so uncomfortable!"

"Well, yes, thanks I —" He sat uneasily on the edge of the Queen Anne chair, his eyes drawn to her, he, against his will, struck dumb.

She was in black for the great-aunt and her pale red-gold hair was drawn tightly back. Light lay along the bones of her face. The empty green eyes stared impassively out at him without malice or kindness; utterly deprived of desire, they reduced the room, the flowers, that corpse behind the closed doors, the canaries and himself to nothing. He was annihilated before her gaze. She looked as the dead look into illimitable distances, enamored hopelessly of the thing the living cannot see, having gone down into those dark caverns where the old woman was confined now to promise body and soul to the dark lover. He was caught and held in terrible fascination by the sculptured head with its pale twisted rope of hair, and as one confronted by the Medusa head he felt turned to stone, impotent.

"But what is it?" she said in her sweet flat voice. "Have you a headache? You look quite ill."

With an effort he pulled away from her. There was a pause, then through the roaring of an invisible sea he heard his own voice faint and far off. "Victoria, what are you going to do now?"

"Do? What should I do? As I have always done. Why?"

"But I mean," he said, trying to shut out the sound of that sea, "how will you live?"

She had a ladylike horror of talking of money. She frowned and blushed. "You needn't worry about us, Ramsay. Auntie has left us quite well off. And of course Raoul has his work — though we aren't really dependent on that, you know," she hastened to assure him.

Then it was the unaccountable thing happened. The roar of that sea swelled, surged forward, he was carried by its waves, found himself next her on the sofa, pressing close against her, awkwardly clutching her hand and mumbling in earnestness and distress half-formed phrases, thoughts darkly conceived in the mind, his love for her, his need of her, loneliness, despair, he must speak, could not help himself, and all the time clutching her hand so tightly she thought the bones would be crushed.

"Please, Ramsay! Please!" This is impossible, it can't be happening, she was thinking, then she ceased thinking and was only aware that he was weeping, that he had become inhuman, horrible, like an animal weeping, and she, struggling wildly, blindly, while he hovered over her like, yes, a great vampire bat with wings spread, descended, pinioned her in an awkward embrace, mauling her with fumbling caresses, mouthing words that had no meaning, Why, Victoria? no, no, Good God, good God. . . . And even as she fought him off, instinc-

tively silent, reserving her strength, her mind could comprehend nothing more than that he wore a tie with large red polka dots on it, such large polka dots indeed that they came swimming before her eyes like balloons, wavered, hung, blotting out everything else, even the proximity of his red smooth skin, the light brown moustache and the mole under the left eye. Then suddenly she found herself released. Sinking back against the cushions with her eyes still closed she gradually became aware of the opening of the front door, of footsteps in the hall, of Raoul who had come home.

No one spoke. She could not open her eyes for Ramsay's confusion and embarrassment would have been dreadful to see, so she missed the gesture — a sign of absolution, of reconciliation which he made toward her — but she heard him stumbling over the turned-up corner of the rug on his way out, leaving the room so finally that she knew he would never come back. I must remember to have that rug nailed down before this afternoon, she thought.

"What's the matter, Vicky?" she heard Raoul say. "Nothing," she said dully and opened her eyes. She lay as he had left her, back against the cushions with her hair falling in disorder around her shoulders. The flickering candles behind the glass doors were a meaningless sign, the overpowering scent of the flowers, the endless twittering and chirping of birds were impressions from another world. She could concentrate on nothing, could connect nothing, and was engrossed in watching the procession of translucent red balloons drift across her vision.

Tranquilly, demanding little, giving less, the brother and sister lived on in the old house on Gerard Street and gradually, the old houses around them, shabby gingerbread remnants of another era, were pulled down and new brisk matter-of-fact houses sprang up aggressively in their place. In the old houses that remained, the families who had built them having all died off or gone to live with rich relatives, aliens had come, new people totally foreign to old residents like the Thibaults, and these new people in turn rented dark and draughty rooms in their houses to others who occupied still another place in the great chain of being. Places of business began to appear, springing up like toadstools — garages, barber shops, delicatessens. The patterns of the old sweet elm-shaded silence were broken by the children who played ball, scuttling about like so many quick little animals, by the barking and baying of dogs, the love-making of cats, the gossiping of the women from porch to porch, lovers' quarrels and coquetry in the grass,

the cries of hawkers and the jingling of the junkman's bell. In the midst of this sprawling, noisy, uncensored life, Victoria Thibault and her brother stayed on in the old house, scarcely aware of the changes on the street and protected by an unpainted clapboard fence.

Raoul was quite literally unaware of any reality outside the house and garden. "That boy," the great-aunt used to say to her niece, shaking her head and frowning. "What's to be done about him?"

"He's an artist!" Victoria would reply hotly.

"He's no more an artist than I am."

"But he must be given a chance to develop his artistic ability. My father would have insisted upon it." A vision of her father would take place before her eyes, the sensitive poet's face, the mystic's eyes.

"Oh my poor child, the memory plays malicious tricks; you romanticize your father. What did he care really whether Raoul was a poet or a plumber!"

In these later years Victoria had taken to reading Walter Pater and believed whole-heartedly in living each moment intensely, in burning with that hard gem-like flame, and as she burned she would walk about the garden, leaning for support upon the gargoyle-headed cane to which she had fallen heir.

The house was draughty; its size made it difficult to heat, and Victoria was forced to admit to herself that it was a great expense and extremely difficult to keep up on their meagre inheritance and Raoul's even thinner salary. To speak of financial problems was in the same category as making reference to sex. Seated in the parlor among the bric-a-brac (the great-aunt had had a fear of open spaces and of emptiness and had surrounded herself always with many objects) Victoria, pretending to read, watched her brother. "That's very poor light."

He was writing in his copybook. "Full fathom five thy father lies," he murmured. "The F's are the best," he said irrelevantly.

"You'll ruin your eyes."

"Put out the light and then put out the light," he said, not in comment upon the situation but because the association had occurred to him as a good one for penmanship practice.

"I've been thinking about us and the house," she said in a hard, cold voice, putting down her book. "I've been thinking about money." No, that was all wrong. She stopped, bit her lip, blushing. "There are so many rooms in this house. So many that we don't use." She hesitated for she was always careful not to startle him or force him to

think too much; another shock of the kind that had driven him into this closed grey world would send him plunging wildly through dark spaces, out of reach, out of call. It had been Raoul who had first discovered their father dead, sprawled out on the floor with the blood bubbling at his wrists. They had questioned him, what else did you see, how long were you there, what did you hear? Don't tell them, she had whispered behind her hand, fiercely commanding. Say nothing, do you hear. It is none of their business. So he had kept the secret and it was a part of him and no one, not even Victoria, would know. She was very careful now not to jostle her brother into recognition.

"— is but an after-dinner sleep," he was carving out with infinite care. "Yes, yes, yes," he said impatiently over his shoulder.

"— some nice bachelor gentleman perhaps or an older lady that lives alone?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Quite right."

And so it was that the poor music teacher came to live at the house on Gerard Street. Victoria went to the church about him. "Very earnest serious man, Mr. Albert," said the curate absent-mindedly, looking through his files for Miss Thibault's pledge card. "Ah! here we are! Now let me see, Miss Tibult, your pledge for last year —"

"No, no, Mr. Higgins. It's about Mr. Albert."

"Ah yes, Mr. Albert, very serious, very earnest."

"Oh he's a gentleman, Miss Tibult," said Miss Dudley, the choir directress at the school. "A real gentleman. You wouldn't want to have anyone that wasn't a gentleman in your own home like that but I know for a fact, Miss Tibult. He came to see me and Mother one day and brought Mother a box of chocolate creams and you know Mother can't eat caramels or any of that because of her teeth. Well sir, if he didn't come with the only kind of candy she'll ever eat. We were so surprised. I said, I declare Mr. Albert, you'll spoil her. He said, that's what the men are for, Miss Dudley, to spoil the ladies. Laugh, I thought Mother would die. The tears ran right down her cheeks. She sat there eating those chocolate creams without saying a word. She was that impressed with him. That's what I mean about a gentleman. . . ."

Mr. Albert was a dark, grave man in his middle thirties. He smiled with one side of his mouth only and his mouth was both passionate and humorous. His gaze was gentle and absent-minded and he never quite looked people in the eye but this was from shyness. He wanted to open a voice studio, but he had no money. Victoria,

who liked to think of herself as a patroness of the Arts, urged him to open the studio in the empty wing of her house. There was a separate entrance to this wing. It would be ideal, she said, and very private. She would have two of the rooms fixed up, one for his bedroom, and he could have the studio next it. This room looked out on the garden and would be sheltered from noises of the street. She told him he needn't pay for the rent of the studio until he had some pupils; only the rent of the room. His comings and goings were so quiet and unobtrusive that his presence at first was scarcely remarked. Raoul was oblivious to his presence.

"Who's that?" he would say now and then, seeing Mr. Albert let himself in the garden entrance.

"The new gentleman boarder, Mr. Albert, dear. I explained about him last week."

"When did your young man get back?" he said once. "He hasn't been here in a long while. I thought he'd forgotten you," he added with heavy jocularity. She put up her hands to her face in horror, realizing that he was confusing Mr. Albert with Ramsay.

Without recognizing the way in which she was drifting she found herself beginning to take, from afar, an almost motherly interest in the music teacher. Toward him she adopted an attitude of possessive pride and he was all gratitude and gentle respectful courtesy. Outwardly their relationship was of the most formal, confined to the every-day courtesies, yet gradually his presence impressed itself upon the house, introducing a new element, something foreign and exciting.

Sitting in the lamplight, marking and underlining passages in her book *(Amor signor verace ecco l'ancella tua; fa'che ti piace),* Victoria would look over at the hunched figure in the faded blue dressing gown sitting just outside the circle of light, bent over his scrollwork, and would say, although she expected no answer, "Isn't it nice to have music in the house again, Raoul?" Faintly from the other wing of the house came the sound of a piano; sentimental wisps of melody recalled to her in a luxurious melancholy old, far-off mellowed and shaded summer evenings, her father at the piano with the window raised, the curtains billowing out on the firefly-lighted darkness, her father singing German love songs in a bantering voice, his dark profile of a great night bird in relief against the light from the window, the rest of them sitting, she with a shawl around her shoulders and Cousin Stu Barton's hand moving along her side. (He was a devil and all the girls knew it and they wouldn't have anything to do with him except for gossip,

but it was that music and the odd exciting way her father sang that hushed her right up so she couldn't think of a thing to say to Stu, and later how she cried by herself in bed thinking of what would her father have said had he known.) The great-aunt had thought her father funny. Whenever she spoke of him a tight little smile crept in around her eyes and mouth. Had himself a time, your father, by all accounts. What do you mean, Aunt Victoria? Mean what I said, he had a good time, that's all. Why shouldn't people if they have nothing else to do? And Great-aunt Victoria, who regarded it all with detached amusement and did not criticize, had gone her way leaving the girl to remember from behind the walls of the house and garden (its pristine silence, washed and sterile, death formalized) the swaggering vitality and strength of her father who molded his environment to himself and brought everything he touched intensely to life under his powerful hands.

One day a young girl knocked at Victoria's front door. "Is there a Mr. Albert here that gives singing lessons?" she said. She had a bright quick laughing face and was dressed like a schoolgirl though shabbily. Victoria was struck sharply with the girl's full ripe beauty. In spite of her clothes and her long, unkempt hair, she was brilliant and warm; her face luminous, glowing into color, hurt Victoria almost physically. She felt self-conscious and was aware of being pale, drawn, and old, suddenly. "You've come to the wrong door," she said shortly. "Mr. Albert's entrance is on Loomis Street." She would have closed the door but the girl was already moving over the threshold.

"You won't mind if I come through this way? I've always wanted to see inside these old houses on Gerard Street." She was in the hall and there was nothing to be done with her but to lead her over to the other wing as rapidly as possible. Victoria was furious. Little wretch, she thought. Little prying wretch.

"My grandmother's got an old table like that," said the girl peering in through an opened door.

"Indeed. This way, *if* you please."

"Oh look! What a funny mirror! Looks like one of those in the Fun House. You know the kind I mean — makes you look real fat or else like a long drink of water. Can I see?" She would have gone into the parlor to study herself in the convex mirror had not Victoria grasped her arm tightly above the elbow, hissing, "I said this way!"

"Ouch!" said the strange girl. "That hurts!" And she pulled away from Victoria, rubbing her arm, then she laughed merrily. "You're

just like my grandmother," she said, trotting obediently at Victoria's heels along the darkly polished corridor. "She always says I don't know the difference between a real antique and something from Harvey's furniture store. Do you know Jeff Harvey?" she said somewhat breathlessly in her effort to talk and keep up with Victoria at the same time. "Well, his kid Jeff Junior was my steady and he went and eloped with our maid. Did you ever? It's all been hushed up now but Mom feels that it was really her fault because she said she wouldn't trust Jeff any further than from here to there so when he came to see me she'd make Midge — that was our maid — sit with us. Well, then that darn doublecrosser would say goodby to me like a little gentleman in his knee-pants and sneak around to meet Midge back of the garage —" Now she really had to stop for breath.

I hope she falls on this floor, thought Victoria fiercely. I won't say a word about the wax and maybe she will. The girl skidded suddenly, waved her arms to regain her balance and let out a whoop of laughter. Victoria held open the door that closed off Mr. Albert's wing from the main part of the house. "Why are you taking singing lessons?" she said.

"It was Gran's idea," said the girl. "She told Mom she'd always wanted to take singing lessons when she was a girl and now when she had the money for it it was too late so I'd have to take them instead. Mom said well that will be three hours in the week I won't have to worry about what she's up to." Again the girl laughed merrily. "Through here? Thanks loads. I loved having a look around. I'll tell Gran about your table." She dazzled; her face glowed into hot bright beauty, and Victoria slammed the door shut on her. She was very angry; her cheeks burned. The nerve, she thought. The nerve of that little — go on, say it, bitch, that was it. It was so obvious, it stuck out all over her. That poor man! What a shock he was in for! Of course, he could turn her down. I hope he does, she thought; then, more calmly, well, that would be rather silly, after all he can't be too choosy when he's just getting started and in this town. Now, going back to the parlor, she felt cool and sensible again. Well, really it is laughable, that little piece coming in here, forcing her way in to look at the "antiques." Mr. Albert would be amused, she thought. But something warned her. Better not tell him; it might prejudice him against the girl. She blushed as she thought this for she knew it was not the real reason for her reticence.

It was one of those desolate October days when the streets are

deserted and the only sound is the dry scuttling of the leaves in the alleys and the houses present secretive facades in a conspiracy of silence. Victoria and Mr. Albert sat by the fire over wine and little cakes talking of music. Schumann, she said, had for her a tremendous spirituality. The emotion, the tenderness, the rapturous sensibility — her father, she remembered, had played Schumann on dark blue summer evenings summoning a subtle response from the night. A moment later she blushed in shame having to admit to herself that memory plays malicious tricks for he had played badly, striking notes that even she had recognized as false. "Music is a way of life," she said defending herself.

Mr. Albert stared at his feet in their polished shoes and said gently, "Music is my way of life. I don't think I quite see what you mean." Smiling he lifted the wine glass to his mouth and drank greedily as one who is thirsty.

"But it is so much more than a means of living. Passion, experience, the ideal, the actual, all in one —"

But again he shook his head, smiling. "Those are very fine words, dear lady. But all of us have to make a living. This is my way."

"But is it not a very wonderful experience to teach others how to love music?" She gave him another chance.

He shrugged. "They are mostly youngsters whose parents want them to attain a smattering of culture."

She thought of the girl and her grandmother. "There was rather an odd little thing in here the other day," she said carefully, taking up her embroidery. "Who wanted to go through this part of the house in order to see the antiques, as she said. She was quite taken with the convex mirror and seemed to think we had acquired it from a Fun House." She laughed rather mirthlessly.

He smiled. "That was Sandra," he said. He helped himself to a chocolate eclair and fell upon it hungrily. She could not guess that he was making this do as his evening meal. Watching the procedure she felt a shiver of distaste go through her. How common, she thought; it disturbed her own delicate sensibility and sense of what was fitting that he should reveal himself so unashamedly. And then a curious and frightening thing happened. In reaching for a cupcake he knocked over his wineglass. The dark red liquid spilled out, flowed in a stream across the table top and dripped soundlessly onto the rug. There was a brief, embarrassed pause and then he was on his feet apologizing, cursing his clumsiness. Nervously she stooped and with her

napkin tried to stem the flow of wine. A wave of faintness came over her. Bubbles of wine, airy, diaphanous, winked on the polished surface of the table; drops of wine shimmered and fell, staining darkly the cloth and the rug. She saw again the powerful frame of her father in his riding clothes stretched out on the floor with bright red drops bubbling at his wrists; bright red drops like deflated balloons fell on the rug.

Somehow she was back in her chair and Mr. Albert was holding her glass to her lips, still apologizing, and no, no, she said shaking her head, no, no, the tears streaming down her cheeks, I cannot drink it, take it away.

Indian summer came and Victoria walked in her garden enclosed by the high clapboard fence, carrying the stick with the gargoyle head and poking at the dried asters and the withered chrysanthemums. It was warm; the windows were open onto the garden. She walked beneath the window of Mr. Albert's studio. A girl's light, slightly hoarse voice was singing off-key:

There is a lady sweet and kind
Was never face so pleased my mind . . .

The singing was abruptly broken off. "Oh hell, what a bore!" the same voice said clearly. "Tucks dear, be a honey and give me something else besides this sickly sweet lady passing by. She's been passing by for three weeks now and not a damn thing's happened. It won't either. Listen Tucksie, I want to sing something from an opera."

"You're getting ahead of yourself, Sandra," said Mr. Albert, sounding not at all annoyed. "You've got to start on something simple. Look, let's try this lullaby —"

"Lull me no lullabies, please. I want to sing that thing from *Carmen*. Look! Look at me, Tucks. Wouldn't I make a good Carmen?" There was a silence, then the girl laughed bright and quick and breathless and there was the sound of an abrupt movement, footsteps running across the floor, another shriek of laughter, a crash as something — perhaps a china vase — was knocked to the floor, Mr. Albert saying tenderly, why you little — then silence, terrible and profound. Victoria, moving in a blind dream, crept in close against the side of the house, directly under the window, and stood listening, leaning for support on her cane. She was seized by a wayward panic; her first instinct was to go far away from the window and at once so that her absence might nullify the event and restore the innocence of the Indian

summer day. But curiously held to the spot she stood in terror of what she was to know, her hand shaking like a very old woman's on the cane. As she waited she saw clearly the room with the piano and the Paisley shawl she had given him to drape over it, his books, his pictures, what else did music teachers have in their studios? a bust of Beethoven perhaps? and somewhere the man and the girl standing in a tight, locked embrace. And she saw him as she had seen him that afternoon in the parlor eating cakes and the girl twisting in his arms away from those full eager lips that reached for her thrusting forward in the hungry way they reached for the crumbs, and his hovering face pale and wise swam before her in a bad dream and suddenly, so pointed and harsh was the sound that she swayed and nearly fell, a chord was struck on the piano and he was playing scales (thus had they foreseen all) and "a-a-a-a-a-ah" went the girl, and the day, resuming time, continued as before.

In the days following her discovery Victoria, drawn solidly in upon herself, refusing to relinquish her secret, crept silently about the house shadowing an elusive ghost. Voice lessons behind closed doors continued in that other part of the house. Roulades and scales and arias shut her out; she and Raoul and the great-aunt's ghost were strangers in the house on Gerard Street. Sometimes when she was in the garden Victoria saw the girl coming along the street to her lesson. Sometimes she was singing to herself or whistling and when she saw Victoria she would call out to her cheerfully. Victoria, pretending not to hear, was at the same time struck with the girl's luminous, liquid beauty. She was filled with an emotion so bitter, so intense, that her blood throbbed with it and her entire organic being cried out in protest against this awakening. She took to walking in that other wing past closed doors on feet not deliberately silent but cautious, dusting, arranging, rearranging furniture, carrying fresh flowers into the rooms to replace the dead, and why she did all this she did not know, for all the time she was uneasy and filled with a nameless fear. Mr. Albert suspected nothing, he scarcely noticed her. If he saw her he would bow and smile, but all his communcations with her were by mail. It was as if he were deliberately avoiding her. She could not forgive him, could not believe that once again she who was so anxious to be honest with others had been cheated.

The hurricane lamp flung a feeble light into the corner where Victoria sat over her embroidery. The rest of the room was in darkness, not through real necessity but rather by reason of some ill-defined

romantic craving, some inward lust for darkness on her part. Soon it will be Hallowe'en, she thought, and the children will come and ring doorbells and break things. It was a time for destruction, for Witches' Sabbaths and the dead. Day of wrath O day of mourning. It was the time when the uneasy ghosts of those who had died by violence came back to beg the prayers of the living. Well, Papa, I have prayed for you all these years but I can feel you fighting me from wherever it is that you are. What rot, Vicky. You have become a damn silly superstitious old maid! How very naughty of you, Papa, in your state to swear and carry on like that. I knew I'd be a disappointment to you but I had no choice. Supposing I had eloped with Cousin Stu like he wanted after you died when I couldn't see anyone for tears and never have since?

She picked up Raoul's copy book. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines," he had written, and, "But mine own vineyard have I not kept." Raoul came into the room. His eyes were wild and his mouth open attempting to form words. "Where have you been?" she cried. "What is it?"

Taking up the hurricane lamp he started back toward the doorway. "Where are you going?" She was behind him in an instant, her hand on his arm to stop him.

He lifted his hand and struck her wrist sharply. He had never before done that in his life. It made both of them pale. She did not cry out but she held the wrist tight against her heart. "To Aunt Victoria's room," he said.

"But why? That's Mr. Albert's room. You can't go there!" She had followed him into the hall but she did not dare to touch him again.

"Because," he said and his voice thickened, "I'm going to stop her this time. It's wicked, wrong, very wrong —"

Her heart was racing. It beat so strongly she was afraid it was going to burst right out of her. She followed him up the dark stairway and down through the dark hall. "Stop who?" she whispered and the whisper was like the hissing of a snake in the silence. The small flame pricked the darkness and flung shadows along the walls. She stretched out her arm in front of her and her fingers encountered the harsh prickly wool of Raoul's dressing gown. She followed him like this, a sleepwalker or one who is being led by a guide from another world into that dark kingdom. "It has happened before then," she managed to say at last. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"She gave me some money," he said simply. "She said this is for

the colt. She said if you show you can keep a secret and don't tell a soul I'll give you the rest after a bit. Then you can go up to Lexington with Pistol and buy him. So I didn't tell and she never gave me the rest."

"What are you talking about?" she whispered through stiff lips. She dared go no closer to him yet was afraid to let him get out of reach of her fingers that barely touched the wool of his dressing gown. "What are you saying?"

"Then Pa came and said give me the money and I said what money and he said but you know what money I mean give it to me and I said but it's mine she promised I could buy the colt and he said you ain't going to buy the colt and give me the money so when I saw her go in there I went in after her to tell her what had happened —"

"No!" cried Victoria sharply. She ran ahead of him in the dark, then turned to face him waiting for the lamp's rays. The flame sputtered and flickered and the shadows whirled drunkenly. His face under the light was puzzled and innocent except for the look of slyness in the eyes and, yes — a dreadful kind of pleased pride. She was forced to move backwards before him, hesitantly, a step at a time, through the blue electric darkness. "This time," he said, "I'll tell her she'll have to pay or I'll tell everyone. It's very wicked," he said almost pleadingly, "to make promises and not to keep them." He lifted his hand and knocked at the door.

There was a waiting silence, then the sound of footsteps, cautious, moving slowly and softly away, then another sound like the creaking of bedsprings. Someone breathed heavily and quickly just on the other side of the door. "Who's there?" a man's voice called out sharply. Raoul knocked again. The door opened and there was Mr. Albert, his face pale and furious in the darkness. "Well?" he said. "What is it?"

Raoul stepped back in frightened bewilderment. "You see," said Victoria. "It's Mr. Albert's room. Go back, Raoul. Go back to the parlor, there's a dear."

He went, once more child-like and obedient, glad to respond to any voice of authority, and left them in darkness, facing each other.

"Well?" he said again.

She had begun to tremble violently; her teeth chattered so she could barely speak. "Is *she* in there?" she whispered and her voice was like the dry whisper of the leaves in the alley.

"What business is it of yours?"

"I won't have you under my roof another night."

"All right," he said expressionlessly. His pajama coat was open at the throat and there was something so vulnerable about that naked white gleaming flesh that a sharp stab of pity went through her and made her recoil. "If that's the way you want it." There was a kind of hopelessness in his voice. He moved back into the darkness closing the door.

"Mr. Albert!"

"Yes?" He opened the door again quickly but he looked beaten, cowed.

"I — I will have your things packed and sent on to you." It was not what she had meant to say.

"Thank you." Did she imagine it or was there the sound of weeping in that room? She was filled with a fierce feverish joy. "Now you are really alone," he said and closed and locked the door.

"It's all right, Raoul," she said, going back into the parlor. "It's all right now. He's going, thank Heaven. What would I do without you?" She laid her hand on his shoulder, then quickly withdrew it. He had already forgotten the incident and was once more engrossed in his copy-book. "Put out the light and then put out the light," he wrote with care.

After they had gone she went again to the vacated rooms. She felt the need for some definite action that would commit her to nothing, for as she sat in the dimly-lighted parlor watching the mummified figure hunched in the chair she had had for a moment a wild thrill of terror, for it seemed that she stared at a death's head with empty eye-sockets who watched a skeleton's hand move over the pages writing unrelated lines of verse.

The door of the room was ajar; the room itself empty and echoing as a tomb. There was nothing left. She wandered about the room, reaching out a hand to straighten a pillow or dresser scarf, smoothing the rug with her foot. Empty as a mausoleum where love lay buried. She removed dead flowers from the vases; the odor of decay filled her nostrils. Then she went to her own room. It was dark there too; the light bulb had burned out. She lit the candles that she kept always by her bed, tall white tapers, one on either side at the head. Then she undressed. How cold the room was suddenly! She slipped out of her clothes and left them lying on the floor. The silk of her night-gown rustled around her, caressing her coldly and chastely. She went toward the bed, unpinning her hair. The bed looked like a catafalque with those candles at its head. Only I have no canaries to sing over me.

She began to brush her hair, drawing the brush slowly along it so that it crackled electrically. Outside the wind rustled the leaves and in the garden below dry, dead leaves rattled. She got into bed still brushing her hair. This was a gesture derived from her youth, a symbolic act that had lost its meaning, nevertheless had not lost its original sense of importance. With the act she built each night with careful hands the architecture of her youth, constructing again the young girl's dreams and desires. Now in bed, feeling the sheets lie coldly about her like a shroud she trembled in anticipation of unknown things for which she had not bargained. (How if when I am laid into the tomb I wake before the time —?), longing with her whole being for sleep.

The pine tree outside the window, moving in the wind, cast a huge shadow like the enormous opened wings of a vampire along the wall. She watched, fascinated, the opening and spreading of those immense wings. Still brushing furiously so that her thin hair stood out in a fiery halo around her head, she thought, I wish he were dead, and no, no, her soul cried out in protest but still the curse remained; it had been uttered in her heart and could not be retracted. Again to cheat me so. She began to brush more vigorously. Oh my God, she prayed, take away all such wicked thoughts. Oh my dear lord, Oh my love . . . And letting the brush fall to the floor she fell back against the pillows weeping, exhausted, Oh my love, my love. The unknown form with spread arms hovered over her, waiting to take her, yet still she shrank back, calling out my dear, my dear, yet withdrawing from the rude embrace of those outstretched arms. And down, down into the cone of her dream whirling and spinning, she went to the exact spot, the heart of that circle she knew so well. Shadowy figures moving through a mist sighed and called out, yet did not raise their eyes from the ground, and when, yearning for some human contact, she put out her hand to touch them they melted away from her touch and she groped in an empty space. Dizzy and sick she awoke and found herself alone in a great dark well of silence.

ROBERT HORAN:

Four Sonnets

I

Dreamed in a midnight hive, the one I loved
and I lay naked in a world of ice;
and we indifferent through this chalice moved,
caught in the careless glass of paradise.
Each in his turn tried on the bright jacket
of loomed snow, feathered mail of light.
Sun struck the thorns of each crystaled thicket,
and hounds like tears streaked past the daggered gate.

The pine grew blue, its ragged Gabriel
shifted his arms of ashes. Light withdrew
tine by tine from the once-gilded stable,
and we dug in the steel shade for simple straw.
Then the few flints of evening, the cold choirs,
immaculate music and remembered fires.

II

The labyrinth led on. We spun the thread
into the cave's belly. To whom was it tied?
Not only to my shadow, nor, at my side,
to the baffled companion whom I led
deeper into the summerless heart of dread
than either of us had before visited.
To what was it knotted that it loosed such length,
uncoiled such miles of silk-spidered strength?

Like that arachnid, exfoliating self,
spun on from leaf to rock and spire to grass
from its own center, so I saw myself

unwound acrobatic from the subtle gauze.
Whose head in the dark I kissed, was it a glass
which gave back nothing but what childhood was?

III

Give up, in the glass, the fatal, frowning prince,
crowned with childhood's antlers and zodiac.
Seductive as poppies, his exotic glance
smiles amid impossibles, an almanac
of nightmare's pages: the grotesque, grim dance
down the deep hall to the nursery and back;
the starched, maternal linen; then the black
goodnight; then hands explore the darkened dens.

Give up, in the glass, yesterday's insistent
other, the hopeless swollen king and father
with his knives and his demands, reminiscent
of failure and fever, now and forever.
The matchless queen, too, with her scarlet heart
withdraw from the glass; and then yourself depart.

IV

A masque of meditations, a world as full
of revelations as a feast of lights,
as a leafed window to the hapless idle
who succumb to a pause in their wheel of nights,
on which the separate waters of a river
halt beneath this lens their pure filament,
and the million-eyed from the sweet summer's clover
bumble their gilt baskets of nourishment.

Here, in this loop of shade, I may let fall
these poems with their blurred designs of peace,
to study the action of my life and will
as it unrolls again the constant face
of one who came once with love, all else unarmed;
whom I refused, and know now how I harmed.

FREDERICK BOCK:

The Woodchopping Milkmaid

1

Chops off her hands almost, but the wood
Lies still—haw, haw—see her flinch and whack:
Old widow red as a bride in all this white

Kindliness her churning never filters.
For with no daisy out
but frost
As she dishevels zero with an axe, and
Curds of her breath fly up so crack-a-jig,
Death is no rarer than a day in June.

2

Some rifle ought to end her quick and just
So a gold shot heard in town turned brown
Could gray out, hills away—
Somersault and all—to final crystal.

Trouble is—she doesn't know from a polka
What scrubs our eyes like snow.
If these least days in Winter's balances
Send her reeling like a seventh beer,
Handing a hag too rosy any terror
Could make her our milkmaid all the year.

Covenant

Though pity at the heart of India
Is whirled like ashes on this wind—

Flame heals with its black clutch.
Let it be known: no more
May we be native to
The sophistry of any lighter touch,
Whose window-shopping eve
Grew whole
In the siren's queue.

For the mouse-match quiet
That became immediate Rajah
Whispered to us—the moon,
Your difficulties, all are One.

Since when, vastly pledged,
We cannot single out
—From the forty thousand brick
We walk around—any strict
Sump of bemusement which is death.

Oh, to have taken tea by that light!
Or really to have set some party going
When telephone poles wriggled like palms—
And above our behovely trembling
The god was exposed.

PAUL CARROLL:

Good Friday Service, 1953

(The speaker, a cultivated American, whose family once was New England Unitarian. The painting, Taddeo di Bartolo's "Crucifixion" hanging in the Art Institute, Chicago)

After the modern things, one rests here. The Christ's
Sour mouth, turning ugly; the *consummatum est*
A moment or two before when, one feels,
If there were any birds around by chance
They could have sung a warm black song. But
There are no birds. The body of course
Sags, is soggy, an olive sort of gray
Heavy on the emotions.
Then that sky, a bulging gold
Spreading infecting coercing the clumps of people,
Politicians, the unwashed, the curious
With those whose lot is silence
Like Mary and her women, speech a thing
For birds and dying men: All
Involved in such a public squabble.

One knows of Mary's sorrow — sword's
Pierce, and all that; but those others
Excite more human feelings. There,
That rough square halo hurting the nearest soldier,
He knows he's seen how a god can die;
Awkward, will shrivel, is angry, guessing
Something of the sad, brutal
Price he'll pay for such strange knowledge.

Nearby, bored, a comrade, also pagan:
Routine duty this, this busying with and butchering
Merely another wild-eyed Jewish
Radical. A greasy cloak the only spoil.
Turns away, bland Roman face, and yawns
Slowly. While two Sadducees,

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Now that it's over, rhetoric in their hands,
Are bickering with a turbaned priest
About the possibility
That the dead man's soul may be alive.

Still, I suspect, it all was rather trying:
No birds, the odd embarrassment at someone's
Death; neighbors sweaty, sun-blacked; and
Be forced to feel, while you're standing
Minding your own business,
A Friday afternoon in spring
Abruptly turn to gold
And become a public gold eternity.

CLINTON WILLIAMS:

A Present Cynthia

"Slow, slow, fresh fount"

Turn the withered daffodil
between slow fingers
feeling thus
crisp sere shreds that rustle faintly,
rustle faintly.
Flicker eyelids, flutter pulse:
how is it that
you creep again
down dead stairs feeling saintly,
feeling saintly?
Drop, drop, salt tears
too late upon
the fingered flower;
dry rustle hushed that whispered lately,
whispered lately.
Our beauties are not ours,
but echo still
between the fingers
down the stairs and own us wholly,
own us wholly.

LEONARD CASPER:

Acrobats at Home

Listen!

Tonight she'll serve a lobster claw sucked clean;
and, propped among the flimsy china flames
of empty cups, I'll juggle my disgrace.
(I'm first one up, with makeup on my face
each morning.) Friend, if you have never seen
crustacea, look at me and ask my name.

This carapace, my skeleton, is all.
The old trapeze of flesh that dangles here
is food for pack rats. Fifty years it took
to seal me in this crypt. Did I overlook
that it is wallpaper that holds up the wall,
as it's the cup that makes the broth cohere?

If you would only listen!

Oh, I could speak, I tell you, were it not
for language! All this has happened before,
to Quetzalcoatl, Menelik, and Pym.
Even to T'ang at the stave of a hymn
came the metamorphosis. We felt hot
pennies on our eyes and the crowd's last roar.

This has happened many times to me
when I was there, when they were I, with hides
of bantengs, plant lice, charkhas, rotary churns,
genoa jibs, kinkajous. These things return
to remind me what I was and must not be.
Yet I keep intruding as if untried.

I should have known it was the firmament
of familiarity that gave me form,

the canvas that enclosed, external things
that hammocked me. But too much applause brings
forgetfulness. It is not inside the tent,
but in the lame night whose lament fails to warm
the muscles of the heart, that one recalls
the undersea, the first shore, the tree-calls.
And only in Nirvana need one not conform,
when the soul is its own integument.

I don't know why I've told you all this.

HAROLD WITT:

A Brevity of Grass

A brevity of grass, a grace of daisies,
so summer passed—fugitive faces,
smiles, tears, grimaces, the newsprint
of places, the pictured shore passed

under eyelids of waves death's tides
pounded down and nailed with daisies.
Swift as summer days, as a butterfly lasts
that quickness passed like fugitive faces.

As from the sure shore of places the swift
plane glides to the uncertain inland
hurling hot passengers onto high ice
so summer wrecked, so hectic autumn

greyed, whitened, like an old man shrieked
in his plain black rocker poking white
twig fingers at the black and white paper
though spring sped, "more light, more heat!"

HERBERT GOLD:

Help These Days

"The rest of us are bone and muscle," Arnie Crown was saying to the slow Quinns, "but take that Phil Larkin, he's all nerve — eh Phil?"

It was close on to three in the dim afternoon of Kornman's, a restaurant favored by the small real estate operators of Cleveland. The cole slaw and the butt ends of chicken sandwiches and the wet dust of chopped liver and hard-boiled egg salads had been cleared away, but the four eaters hated to leave Sol Kornman's dehumidified air-conditioning for the July sun and the risks of business outside. They went on nudging each other, teasing and gossiping with the head-cocked smiles of men who never knew when they might pick up a hot tip.

"Always kidding me," Larkin said to Crown, "kidding kidding kidding." He jittered his fork against his dessert plate, puffed from a pipe which had a piece of yellowed adhesive tape holding the broken stem to the bowl, put down the fork and cracked his knuckles. "Anyway, Arnie, you can laugh yourself sick, but that's how I made mine — nerve and knowing the truth about people. Laugh, I don't care. I see through. That's a fact."

"See through what? What's a fact?" the identical Quinn brothers asked together, twin sharpies who ate the same lunches, dressed in the same white palm beach suits because they hadn't yet caught up with seersucker, and leaned with the same wary pout over the crumbs of their meal.

Arnie Crown, easy with food, a fat man with a large shiny bald head, was the only one still eating. "Yeah, tell us," he said with his mouth full. "How come you know?"

"Yes, how come, Phil? What? Come on. What's your fact?"

Larkin was having his second bourbon with water. He took it and then tucked his novelty hand-painted tie (a scene from the pier at Atlantic City) back into the belt worn high below his pigeon-breast. "All right, no hard feelings, men, but I did better than you boys. Stands to reason. Look, I never got married, cut down expenses like that, had people figured in advance — stands to reason. No hard feelings?"

"None," said Arnie Crown.

"Course, naturally, I pay most of the excess profits to my CPA." He searched each of their faces for an answering smile, found none, forced out the joke: "Seepeeay — Cleaning, Pressing, and Alterations."

"So what do you see through the people?" one of the Quinns asked.

"You mean I can't know it because I got me a wife?" Crown inquired through tunafish. "Seeing through people, I mean, the truth about the trade. The nerve I already mentioned. You mean to tell me I can't, Phil?"

Larkin called for another bourbon, never mind the water this time, hopped his nervous glare over them, made sucking noises in the dead pipe, and said, "Let me give you a frinstance. I had my troubles with that hilly-billy. I make my mistakes like everybody, only less so. What I mean, there's no such a thing as friendship in business. That's what I learned, Arnie."

"You learned all that?" Crown asked. "You found out all that?"

"I learned it in business, Arnie. Backwards and forwards. Listen, they don't mix. You can play gin with a guy got as much propitty as you, that's the limit. The very end. The rest is for the papers."

"Where's your for-instance?" Crown demanded.

"A hilly-billy?" asked one of the Quinns.

"Okay, okay, what's the matter, you got a deal on?" Larkin thrust his head forward with a don't-hurry-me glare. "Okay, so okay," he said reproachfully to Arnie Crown. He put down the broken pipe. He took the drink with a quick jerk of his neck, his Adam's apple suddenly strained and lumpy, then hidden in sinew once more. "Remember that hilly-billy Sawyer I had janitoring for me, Arnie? Went from me to you? Clean cut? Quiet type fellow?"

"That your for-instance?" Crown didn't like Larkin and his nerve because he ate too fast, didn't mind spitting through his talk, lived by the brag in his heart and liked it that way. "Well, I got to leave you boys," Crown said to hurry him along. He grinned. "Check!" — but he waited.

"Well, I took to him, that Sawyer, yes, I mean it. Wait a sec, Arnie. Liked him, no kidding. Really did. Was a former gee-eye, he was, came up from West Virginia down in Virginia there. Didn't have much family either, just like me. Well, so . . . He still janitoring for you now, Arnie?"

"Nope," Crown said. "Good chiffon pie that Kornman turns out. Whyjask?"

"That's what I mean about that hilly-billy Sawyer. They're all like that, *un*reliable, *ir*responsible, no good —"

The Quinn brothers were nodding amen.

"Don't care what you do for them. Take an interest in them, then they steal your coal."

Amen — the Quinns were swaying.

"Rob you blind! Steal! No gratitude!"

"They're all like that," a Quinn said.

Larkin turned fiercely on Crown, saying, "But not that Sawyer, that one. He was honest, straight. What do you think, Arnie?"

Crown shrugged his heavy shoulders and grinned and went on chewing.

"I'll tell you what to think," Larkin said. "It don't pay to be good to them. I had him," — and the broken pipe waggled in his mouth. "Does his work good, but he's no damn good. Everybody likes me, everybody says it's a pleasure to work for me, but friendship and affection gets you *no*place with him. Sawyer! All he needs is maybe the right touch of ambition, gets you someplace, and maybe he could stop janitoring and be a manager, but not him. Unsteady. Unreliable. That Sawyer, the whole city should know. Tell you a story about him, Arnie."

"Didn't he used to work for you, Phil?"

"That's what I'm telling you," — shaking his head stubbornly at Crown's slow grin. "Turns out I already told you he worked for me. Waiter!" Larkin called for another bourbon, the only one of the four to drink in the afternoon, a self-loving thing to do on a heavy afternoon in a season of difficult business. "Worked for me in my Park Villas back in '49," Larkin went on. "Said he didn't like this, didn't like that, didn't care for the suite I fixed up for him. Wasn't a bad suite, Arnie. True story. Lots of families would of given their right arms. All right, a man's got a right to live decent, even a janitor. Specially a good janitor, a custodian. Understood?"

The Quinns understood.

"I went out of my way to please. A nice quiet boy, looked honest. With the result was I liked him. All right, so I fixed him up, remodelled, all new tile shower, big new beautiful Grand gas range, iceless with the deep freeze attached —"

"So?" Crown asked.

"Electrical fixtures, a floor lamp or two, I forget how many, carpeting for his hall —"

"So?"

"They're no damn good, that's what I'm showing. I'm proving it by Sawyer. Kindness don't get you noplace. A lovely suite, sanitas for the walls, fresh linoleum — I ripped up the old stuff and put it in the basement —"

"So why'd he quit?"

Larkin made a wet noise, angry and disgusted, through his empty pipe. "Money," he said.

The Quinns and Arnie Crown rocked back and forth. This was a ritual laughter, mouths open but silent, unhilarious. "You forgot to pay him?" Al Quinn asked, rubbing at the black mat of hair on his wrist. "He forgot to pay him," he said. It was too hot to laugh aloud. Except for Larkin, they were leaning thick and quiet in the heavy air. Kornman's air-conditioning must have gone on the bum. They swayed with their silent laughter.

"A man he can't live by fresh linoleum and floor lamps alone," Crown suggested at last.

"Course I paid! I paid good!" Larkin burst out. The fishbone tendons squirmed in his neck. "That's the whole point of the story. One day I took him to the bank with me, I said, Look, see that manager over there? See him? The white collar? He makes four thousand a year. So what does that Sawyer say? Wish *I* did, he says. That's what he says. Figure it up I says. Add. Go on, total. I was as close to him as *this* — I felt like a father to him. You do better'n he does, I says, counting in the rent and how he has to buy expensive clothes and put up a front."

"You had him there," one of the Quinns volunteered.

"And so?" Crown said.

Larkin glared at them in triumph. "So that dummy Sawyer, that no-good, that hilly-billy cluck: *Can't save nothing,* he says. Almost like he didn't want to work for me." Larkin took to shaking his head now that the words were out, hardly believing his own tale and fretting once more below the enormity of Sawyer's ignorance. "Cain't save nothin, that Sawyer says," — and Larkin plucked at the yellowed adhesive tape on the stem of his pipe.

"Who can?" asked Crown.

"*Just* what I says to him, Arnie. Who can? These days we all got expenses. I'm here to tell you I worry more than any hilly-billy Sawyer. Sure, maybe a higher type expenses . . ." He pulled triumphantly at the discolored tape. "The taxes, the government, the cost of living."

"Well," Fred Quinn said, "what's the story?"

"He quit. I even offered him his Christmas raise in October, and the whole city knows how it's bad business to show them you need them, you want them. I wanted to do something for that boy. That's how sincere I felt. Yep, after I fixed him up that nice suite, all modern conveniences, he went and quit on me, and I didn't hardly even have time to hire a no-good. I had a run of no-goods ever since. Aggravations all the time. And I tell you I paid good. I was nice to them. My fingers to the bone for them. I would of made that Sawyer my manager, my personal representative in the place, if he'd of only been steady. I extended myself to him. They're all a bunch of drifters —"

"Absolutely right," one of the Quinn boys said.

"Every last one, the good are worse than the bad."

"They get independent," the other Quinn said.

Crown, flushing after so much rich food, bent his head devoutly to tip-touch his smile with the napkin. "That what you know about Sawyer, Phil?"

"Worked for you, didn't he, Arnie? Janitor in your Friendly place?"

"Phil's right." The Quinns were busy agreeing with each other. "You can treat 'em too good. They take advantage. Eat your heart out. It don't matter how nice you are, they don't see it. They get that way. Just so they got something to eat, got what to drink —"

"Can't trust them," Larkin announced impatiently.

"Why, they don't know how many months there is in the year," Al Quinn said, "those hill-billies."

"Twelve," Crown said, "twelve months to the year, but it feels like thirteen if you count March the fifteen."

Larkin was excited, tapping his pipe against the glass, and the stem separated itself from the bowl. The nervous ting brought the waiter with another bourbon. It was a mistake, but Larkin took it anyway. "He liked me fine, that Sawyer, said so himself, but he just can't stay in one place — a born drifter. No good for nothing, those boys. I liked him! Treated him like a son! You must of had the same sperience, Arnie, that why you asked?"

Crown's blink said, *Asked what?* Then his smile spread slowly over the plump dark face stained by purple no-shaving. "No, no," he said, "I only treat my sons like a son."

Phil jerked toward him. "Well, I never had a son — no time. No time to get married. Other managers could of done the job, a clerk maybe — the shortage of managers — but I liked him, that's why.

Shows you can't trust one of them hilly-billies. Just quit on me, Arnie!" — and his voice came up shrill.

"They been spoiled," the Quinns mourned. "No appreciation what you do for them. All tile shower, he said. They don't care. Just so they got a buck in the pocket —"

"Arnie!" Larkin cried out. "I actually liked him. I sort of took to that Sawyer, but you see how wrong I was?"

"Dead wrong," a Quinn said sadly.

"Everybody in town knows the type. A good janitor, but unreliable. Laziness, not money. Never be sure if he'll show up a Sunday morning after a Saturday night. Isn't that why you fired him too?"

"No," said Crown, his bald head gleaming in the yellow light of Kornman's chandeliers, his face bowed toward the napkin now folded into his dessert plate.

"Why? That no-good. I even gave him a push-up because he had a nice way. I used to like to see those things, do like that. Now I've learned. Why did you fire him, Arnie?"

Crown murmured softly, "Didn't."

"Didn't fire him? He quit? Run off? Stole money this time, the linens, the tools? You had to learn how to be hard like me, eh Arnie? Now it's doggy-dog for you too, eh? Knew he'd come down fast, that one."

"Nope," said Crown. He turned the plump smile full across the table. "No," he repeated, "I got him working, he's my Hotel Friendly manager now."

The chairleg squealed as Larkin jumped to his feet, was up, was out. His nose and mouth sniffed and wiggled. His narrow leather heels clacked. He grabbed his hat from the girl, but forgot to pay the check. Was gone because Sawyer liked Crown.

The Quinns, letting their palm beach jackets be switched with a brush by Kornman's boy, extending their arms and turning their backs, worried aloud because the heat, and even a heat like this, was no excuse for being so nervous. They remembered what had happened to Joe Sharon. Joe had turned out to have blood pressure. "No way you can be sure of the help these days," the Quinns told each other. "Take Phil there, now it's like he says. You got to operate alone."

Crown put the broken pipe in his pocket, the lip-soiled ravellings of tape sticky in the faulty air-conditioning. He insisted on paying Phil's check. The Quinns argued, but he paid.

MELVIN BACKMAN:

Sickness and Primitivism: A Dominant Pattern in William Faulkner's Work

Back in 1932 in a short but perceptive preface to William Faulkner's "Miss Zilphia Gant," Henry Nash Smith remarked how Faulkner's characters, living for the most part below the levels of conscious thought, are ruled by their subconscious drives, which they tend to regard with a sort of dull hostility. Mr. Smith went on, "He [Faulkner] seems often to be battling publicly with something deep and hostile within himself which he cannot see or define." Faulkner himself in the Stockholm address spoke of the necessity of a writer's not forgetting "the human heart in conflict with itself." Faulkner's statement, in its implication of the writer's full awareness and choice, is a somewhat deceptive expression of the savage uncomprehending struggle in which the Faulknerian protagonists are compulsively locked. Yet it is this very conflict within his characters which provides the major source of tension in the best of his novels.[1] These characters are part of a large Faulknerian gallery — sick, self-tormented and death-seeking figures: the coldly violent Bayard of *Sartoris* bent on self-destruction, the sensitive and shrinking Quentin Compson, the rootless Joe Christmas in his lonely inevitable flight to self-crucifixion, and his spiritual brothers Charles Bon and Bon's son who likewise choose death to a life-in-death. In fact, that Faulkner chooses the mulatto so often for his protagonist may be due not so much to his interest in the Negro but in the sickness, the utter spiritual homelessness of the mulatto, about which he is driven to write. These sick protagonists are alone — cut off by their misery and inner conflict from the others, unable to give or receive love. And almost always they are in compulsive flight, desperately seeking escape or at least motion — as though the motion itself and not the end of the flight is

[1] George Marion O'Donnell's statement that the base of Faulkner's work is the Sartoris-Snopes ethical conflict is not substantiated. In Faulkner's four best novels *(The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August,* and *Absalom, Absalom!)* neither a Sartoris nor a Snopes plays any part. Moreover, an ethical conflict between the two classes plays neither a primary nor a secondary role in the tension or plot or thematic development of any of these four novels.

the object, as though the very whirling of the body through space is the only means of temporarily stilling the high screaming of their nerves. Or if they are not in flight, they are suspended in motion, suspended in time, suspended in life — paralyzed, will-less, compulsively still and helpless. And they belong nowhere. Possessing only a loveless past to complement their homeless present, they can find no shelter, no peace, no refuge in this world. They are, as Faulkner sees it, the modern man. They are the crux of Faulkner's work. Until the reader faces within himself the tensions and loneliness and misery of these characters, until the reader opens his heart to these strange driven haunted figures, he cannot hope to participate in any of Faulkner's major work.

Set against these figures of sickness are the primitives, who are free from enervating inner conflicts and who pursue simple direct lives. They are generally close to nature and isolated from the world of ambition and greed and strife. They are unthinkingly in accord with the scheme of the universe: they do not question themselves or their world, they are not racked by doubt or fear, they are not haunted by the past. Where the Faulkner protagonist is paralyzed by indecision, they are men of the deed; where the protagonist is immeasurably alone, they are sustained by a basic or traditional social unit — generally the family. They are satisfied with little, their lives are woven around a few basic physical and emotional needs. They are self-sufficient and independent. Usually they are of country stock, hill-bred folk, accustomed to hard lives and to working with their hands. To this group must be added the Negroes, who qualify by their capacity to endure stoically, and the idiots and morons, who qualify by their very insulation from the lusts and cruelty and shattered idealism of modern man. It is almost exclusively to the primitives that Faulkner assigns the capacity to love and pity, the Rousseau *pitié*. Apparently Faulkner's image of the primitives is based largely on his concept of the very wants and needs of his sick protagonist.

In his novels these primitives do not offer an adequate balance to the sick protagonist who dominates the work, but they do serve as a conscious and unconscious source of strength for Faulkner. They are the ideal, illusionary though it may be, against the reality; they are the rift of light in the darkness. One cannot accurately say that Faulkner's novels are a battleground upon which these two forces struggle, for the forces of sickness are too overwhelmingly present; but one may with reasonable accuracy say that the primitives serve to

bring some relief, if not hope, to an otherwise painful world. But for the reader the real hope lies in the very fierceness and intensity of this conflict. One does not struggle so fiercely unless there exists the will to resist; one does not feel so intensely unless there exists the ideal to be outraged.

It is with the intention of tracing this pattern of sickness and primitivism, which I believe to be a dominant one in Faulkner's work through 1942, that I shall examine six of his novels covering the period 1929-1939.

What emerges most overwhelmingly in *Sartoris* is the sickness of self that drives young Bayard on to a course of violent self-destruction, a sickness so uncontrolled by the author that its main source and motive are not adequately explained by the events of the novel. Bayard's state of mind runs away with the author. The only episodes that possess fundamental force and conviction to be set against this gnawing sickness are the family scenes in the McCallum home and in the little run-down Negro cabin where Bayard spends his Christmas. They are the family isolated from our world: the patriarchal family of the McCallums[2] bound in warm simple affection, living in sustaining proximity with nature, and occupied with the hard reassuring physical reality of life on a backwoods farm; the Negro family living as an integral unit in a manger-like cabin, drawing strength from the very struggle to fulfill the basic physical needs of life, and maintaining despite a meager existence a generosity and cheerfulness of outlook. Both households are described as refuges of warmth and light in a world of cold and darkness. They are little pools of peace in a sea of chaos, but they are not for Bayard, who can bring only desecration to them. Bayard does not belong. Order and peace, reconciliation to life are not for him — only the sickness of the dislocated and introverted self.

Out from the gray desolateness of the contemporary wasteland of *The Sound and the Fury,* there lifts the poignant image of the childhood world of unstained love. But when the simple affection between brother and sister is transformed by time to incestuous desire, the

[2] The father of the McCallum family and his youngest son Buddy are described in similar terms as Jewel Bundren and as the tall convict in *The Wild Palms* — Indian-like, aquiline, grave, tall, silent. They are "natural" men.

world becomes a wasteland and life a burden. So does it seem to Quentin Compson. If the outlook of Quentin appears too morbid and shrinking, at least his torment has been made valid in terms of his life and character, although one may object — as Faulkner does in the appendix — that Quentin is too much in love with death. But since so many of Faulkner's protagonists pursue death in one form or another, why, one may ask, does Faulkner take exception to Quentin? I believe it is because Quentin too quickly retreats from life. Sensitive and imaginative and compassionate (within the limitations of his self-centeredness) though he may be, he remains essentially too spiritless. He may be but a moth rushing into a candle's flame to a fiery death, but let him at least beat his wings. He lacks in his inner conflict something of the fierceness of a Bayard Sartoris or a Joe Christmas or even a Gail Hightower. Although he does not, like the other protagonists, seek release through compulsive flight, he does succeed in having two beatings inflicted upon him before surrendering to the final closing of the water above his head. Outwardly his beatings are the result of his impotent attempt to attack his sister's lover, once in reality, the other time in his dazed imagination. Characteristic of most of Faulkner's protagonists will be this curious masochistic-sadistic streak, as though this urgent desire to be hurt or to hurt others becomes a means of making pain more endurable by transferring it from the spiritual to the physical realm.

One must, before leaving Quentin, mention something about the association of sex with death in this novel, as if part of Quentin's sexual nausea was shared by the author himself. The cedar and water are the two associative symbols. It is in the hammock by the cedar grove that Caddy and her daughter are nightly introduced to sex; it is in a cedar grove that the Compsons are buried. The cedar, once a Biblical symbol for magnificence and beauty and incorruptibility, and once part of the dignified archway to the ante-bellum plantation mansions, has become but a sad observer of lust and death. It is by the muddy water of the branch that Caddy first stains herself the night of Damuddy's death. It is by the branch that Quentin lying beside Caddy, on the night of her meeting with Dalton Ames, ineffectually contemplates incest and then murder. And it is of course by water that he chooses to meet death.

What is there as balance against the sickness of Quentin's world and the ugliness of Jason's? There is Dilsey, there is Benjy. Dilsey is significant not only because of the endurance and fortitude with

which she meets life but because she is the core of the disintegrating family, its surrogate mother. As she painfully climbs the stairs to answer the machine-like querulous calls of Mrs. Compson, as she seeks to protect Caddy's daughter from the angry assaults of Jason, and as she unfailingly watches over Benjy, she serves to keep together the shell of the family. For Faulkner the family is not only the preserver of tradition, it is the fundamental group unit from which an individual receives the love that brings identity and that makes life livable. Benjy's virtue is essentially negative: by his very idiocy he is exempt from the lust and the introversion and the greed that attack the others. For Benjy, Caddy has never become a bitch. It is indicative that only Benjy and Dilsey can respond with simple affection.

The Bundrens (in *As I Lay Dying*), although a more integral family unit than the Compsons, are subject to sickness too. In Addie Bundren there is a terrifically drained quality — taking its root from the conviction that life is but a cheat, that the high-sounding words are dead, and that the reason for living is the getting ready to stay dead. Yet she brings to her despair something of the fierceness, something of the lonely power of a Macbeth.[3] She is utterly alone: she shares no life with her neighbors, she believes neither in their religion nor their morality nor the words of sin and salvation that they mouth without comprehension. And she is apart from her husband, for he is dead to her. Her first two children, Cash and Darl, are but the instruments that violate her aloneness. For ten years after the birth of Darl she guards her aloneness, while the wild blood within her surges in protest against life. For a moment, at the entrance of an adulterous love, life by its very intensification seems more bearable, but it is only with the coming of Jewel, the child of sin, that the wild blood boils away and a new calm descends. In her partial expiation of her guilt and in her gratitude for Jewel, she gives Dewey Dell and Vardaman to Anse. Yet she remains alone, sustained in the face of her despair by the belief that there is a duty to the living, sustained by a proud individualism and a fierce courage and endurance, and sustained by her guilty love of Jewel. Although she is one of Faulkner's sick pro-

[3] In fact, the title *The Sound and the Fury,* recalling the magnificent power and terror of Macbeth's despairing speech, seems more appropriately applied to a story revolving around Addie than to one around Quentin.

tagonists, she brings such force and strength to her protest against life that she tends to take on some of the self-sufficient individualism of Faulkner's hill-bred primitives.

It is in Cash and Jewel, however, that we have two varying yet complementing aspects of a Faulkner primitive. Cash is the worker with his hands, the honest craftsman finding identity in his craft, the stable responsible element of the family, and by his very sanity its elected guardian. In his devotion to the common cause of the family and in his stoic endurance of pain he reaches the heroic level, although in his matter-of-fact unself-consciousness he may seem anything but heroic. His testing comes at the fording of the river: as a heavy log rams into the wagon, Cash embraces the coffin in a final protective effort, as though to shield it with his own body. Addie in the coffin seems a life-in-death symbol, like one of Frazer's drowned gods. She is associated by Vardaman with the fish he caught the day she died, and the fish symbolism (the fish is a life symbol of immemorial antiquity) suggests that she is fundamentally still alive for her family. Vardaman, Dewey Dell, and even Darl constantly refer to her as though she were still living. (That she seems so unbearably alive to Darl may be the reason that he burns the barn.) Each member of the family is measured by his relationship to the coffin. Cash makes the coffin sound and true, keeps it unstained and battles with a rearing bearded log to preserve the coffin from the sucking swirling current. But Cash is mainly the maker. It is Jewel that is the warrior — the warrior on horse, loving his steed with something of the same furious devotion that he bears for his mother. As Addie tells Cora Tull, "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me." And Jewel passes successfully through the ordeal of water and fire. To bring the living corpse to its final quiet, both Cash and Jewel will be called upon to risk what they love most, what gives each his identity — Cash his tools, Jewel his horse. But it is to Jewel, the man of the deed, that the honor of this sacrifice is allotted.

In no other novel of Faulkner's does a sick protagonist so dominate the work as does Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. From his life the other lives draw their meaning. Faulkner has at last found the right figure to carry the burden of the suffering and irresoluble conflict that trail throughout his work. The burden is valid in terms of Christmas's life, but what is more important is that Faulkner has

found the protagonist whom he can treat with the necessary objectivity and who can at the same time tap fully the rich creative source of tension within Faulkner.

The Christ symbolism (his name, his self-sought crucifixion, his age — 33 years — and the washing of his feet by Mrs. McEachern) may be spasmodically and uneasily handled, as Richard Chase has suggested. But there is a bitter significant irony behind the symbolism; for Joe is the new Christ, the only kind the twentieth century can produce — baptized by a Jezebel, ridden by the conflict of black and white blood within himself and within his culture, rootless and homeless, knowing no love and giving none. Early in the story Hightower gives the clue when he calls him, "Poor man. Poor Mankind." And Joe is Man. He is the country boy raised in the Puritan and patriarchal household, corrupted by town, rising in rebellion to kill the father image and the Puritan "Thou shalt not." Abandoning the country he moves in restless flight through towns and cities — taking on in the process the character of the rootless urban man of today. From the old Calvinist point of view he is Satan rebelling against God, represented by McEachern; McEachern sees himself as a divinely appointed instrument and acts as though he were Jahweh himself come to take vengeance upon man the sinner. From another point of view, Joe is the liberator —the new god killing the old god, the son killing the father. And all this for a prostitute who rejects him and his sacrificial deed. But there is more than cynical commentary intended here. We must not in the presence of the toughened criminal that the later Joe seems to represent forget the youth. At first Joe is the naive and innocent youth traumatically shocked by the revelation of women's menstruation, fighting against his first promiscuous adventure in an unconscious attempt to preserve his virginity and to protest against the cheapening of the sexual act (Faulkner may be implying too that this is the black blood in Joe rebelling against the white prostitution of the Negress). To a washed-out little prostitute Joe brings a simple and frank love. But after Joe is discarded by his woman and abandons the farm, the racial problem moves to the fore — and Joe becomes the embodiment of the racial conflict itself. His life becomes flight through unending merging "spaces of light and dark" — flight from the white within the black blood and from the black within the white. It is all epitomized in his final eight days of flight when "time, the spaces of light and dark, had long since lost orderliness" . . . and day is like night, and sleep

taking him in the state of running or kneeling has become but a coma in which sleeping and waking are inextricably mingled. Toward the end of the book Joe takes on again the burden of his Christ symbol: he is the vengeful manacled god striking at his derelict priest, striking at the Southerner who living with the ghosts of the past has failed the Negro, has failed humanity, has failed life itself and become but a death-in-life figure. Joe has become a crucified Christ to remind man of man's brutality.

Linked to Christmas's symbolic meaning as mankind's representative is his significance as the man of sickness. He is part of a decaying and shifting and empty society, belonging nowhere, fleeing from self into death, possessing that curious masochistic-sadistic streak that manifests itself in innumerable beatings and whippings and that leads to a sort of apotheosis when he passively but ecstatically embraces his final pain and death. He is the lonely man — the man who at the same time he lashes out at those who would break into his aloneness cannot bear his aloneness. He is Faulkner's modern representative.

Joe Christmas is the central figure of death, but there are other figures of death — Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden. Hightower in his seeking of insulation from life through retreat, in his seeking of immunity through a spurious martyrdom is actually seeking death. Miss Burden — spinster, nymphomaniac, and barren old woman — by her very perversion of the role of woman has chosen death in place of life. And suddenly a pattern in the book evinces itself — a contrapuntal intertwining of two themes. Against the figures of darkness and death move the figures of light and life — Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. Lena Grove is woman in her most natural and traditional role as mother; she is the simple character attuned to nature. She is identified with Mother Earth, and like the unceasing murmur of the insects throughout the story, she is part of the never-ending placid current of life. Like a planet revolving in its preordained orbit, she pursues without apparent volition her inevitable and unerring course; like a serene goddess sojourning on earth she is served by all men as though they were administrants to Ceres. The major administrant, Byron, is another of Faulkner's primitives — of the hillfolk who serve by their very simplicity as isolated towers of strength. And Byron, though handled with affectionate irony, is such a tower. He is the lover in the book, capable of an unflagging single-minded devotion that Faulkner assigns almost exclusively to his primitives (like Benjy, Ruby Lamar in *Sanctuary,* Monk and Fentry in *Knight's Gambit,*

and even the idiot in *The Hamlet).* Yet Byron displays other significant aspects of a Faulkner primitive: he works tirelessly, yet asks little reward; he accepts without question a modest role in life; he manifests a stability that links him to the earth and to health.

In the end the figures of death yield the stage to the figures of life — so that once again there is light in August, and mankind in the shape of Lena's child (symbolically it is Christmas's child too) has passed over to the side of life. Yet those figures that have penetrated most deeply into our imagination are the figures of death and sickness, for Faulkner's closest kinship is to them.

After the creation of Joe Christmas, Faulkner's commitment to the sick protagonist undergoes a general decline. Nevertheless, in his strange remarkable *Absalom, Absalom!* the current of sickness still runs strong, although one must admit that the novel does not derive its fundamental tensions from a conflict between the primitive and the sick. Partaking of the paralysis that besets so many of Faulkner's tormented protagonists (Quentin Compson, Horace Benbow, Harry Wilbourne, and even Bayard Sartoris and Joe Christmas in their moments of suspension) are Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen; for them the Civil War period represents four long years of personal indecision. Bon in his search for his father is a familiar Faulknerian figure — parentless, rootless, beset by a curious apathy and weariness of life. In the face of Sutpen's "design" Bon's quest for sonship is doomed, and knowing this he seeks death at the hands of his brother. Henry Sutpen is another familiar figure. He is the son of the giant, doomed by this very fact to a life of impotence, substituting for a life of action the moral searching of the inactive man. He has many cousins — Bayard *(The Unvanquished),* the son of Colonel Sartoris; Hightower's father, the ministerial son of the Civil War hero; and even Isaac McCaslin, grandson of the ruthless pioneer. They are the men whose manhood is lived out in a defeated and depleted South when the days of the giants and their dynasties are forever of the past. The men of the deed are succeeded by the men of conscience. These are the men who are racked by their sin to their Negro brother, which is the chief heritage of the great "design."

Looming over his two sons is the titanic figure of Thomas Sutpen. Free from the paralysis that gnaws at his sons, iron-willed and direct, possessing the strength of innocence and simplicity, he is partly kin to Faulkner's primitives. But having yielded his soul to the "design"

he has forever removed himself from their clean and well-lighted world. His sin rests in his wrenching of the family from its primitive and traditional function as a source of affection and social stability and individual identity to an instrument of self-procreation and of the founding of a dynasty. His sin is the denial of sonship to his Negro son, of wifeship to his Negro wife, of brotherhood to his Negro and his white sons. It is the sin of Carothers McCaslin. It is the sin of the caste system. It is the sin of the "design."

Twisting in the coils of this past, Quentin Compson threshes in a paralyzing inner struggle with the moral horror of his heritage and the fascination of its giant maker — Sutpen. He is like the victim of a nightmare, frozen into paralysis and rapt attention by the horror and fascination of his dream. All time is obliterated, life suspended, the very air frozen still. Once more Faulkner has succeeded in channeling the sickness — this time into an agonized exploration of the past.

The Wild Palms marks a significant milestone in Faulkner's writing career. No longer does the tension within the author seem the chief source of the creative power of his work. The sick protagonists are held at arm's length and are manipulated much too consciously, becoming but instruments to carry the weight of the author's thesis. That Faulkner shifts his attention to the novel with a thesis does not augur well for his creative powers; moreover, it brings him to the novel of ideas, a type of writing to which he does not seem naturally suited and which does not tap his deeper imaginative and emotional powers. In this novel Faulkner has consciously twisted the two threads of primitivism and sick modernity together so that modernity in its negative and blighting aspects is thrown into high relief. If the constant counterpoint of the two stories ("Old Man" and "The Wild Palms") is not convincing, as most critics have said, it may be partially explained by the critics' failure to comprehend the author's intention and by their failure to respond to the thematic development of the work. A sharp unceasing contrast between two worlds and between two men forms the contrapuntal structure of *The Wild Palms.*

One is the world of the River, the Old Man — the "strong brown god — sullen, untamed, intractable . . . almost forgotten by the dwellers in cities." The river rears and leaps over man's puny dikes, its crest swirling "like the mane of a galloping horse"; it becomes a ruthless male force pushing over the female earth in eternal violation. And the tall convict, "his teeth bared in his bloody streaming face

while his spent arms flailed the impotent paddle at the water," pits his little strength against the savage power of the Old Man. It is an ancient honorable struggle, of which one must be worthy and for which one must have preserved through his forbears something of the primitive strength and simplicity of long ago. As we follow the tall convict and the pregnant woman in their heroic Odyssey, it is as though we are moving back into remote time. There is the stirring birth scene upon the Indian mound, just a bit of land in a sea of water, an "earthen Ark out of Genesis." In the midst of wild animals seeking refuge from the flood, the convict equipped with a shoelace and the jagged edge of a tin can assists the woman in delivering the child. Afterwards the convict makes fire and stews a rabbit that he has won by beating off a hawk. He feeds the woman first; then, both having eaten, they sleep beside the fire in the peaceful interlaced gloom of the cypresses. Like Noah and his family, they seem God's chosen. Later in the journey it is as though they are carried back into some primeval world where the water has not fully receded, and the earth is but a morass, and dinosaurs rule the swamps, and man has not yet learned to speak. It is the interlude when they live with the Cajan, and the convict armed with a knife and club fights his fierce bloody battles with thrashing monsters. Life for all its savage daily combat seems good to the convict.

The tall convict and the woman and her unborn child, cast into a skiff on a Mississippi flood, have become representatives of the primitive family when man served as protector and provider, and woman functioned primarily as mother. They have become the symbol of life itself — the very image of the three within the shell of the boat enclosed by water serving as a kind of intra-uterine symbol of birth.

But by the very intertwining of the chapters of the two stories, we are constantly reminded that there is another world that rules, a world that has imprisoned the natural man. It is the middle-class world of Charlotte Rittenmeyer, the "liberated" woman who abandons the role of mother and is compelled to usurp the male role by the failure of the male himself; of Harry Wilbourne, the helpless modern male marked for defeat by a general stasis of will and by a failure of nerve; of Rat Rittenmeyer, the betrayed husband, whose masculinity is clipped by the conforming pressures and inhibited emotions of his upper-class world. The flight of the lovers carries them into the disordered city-world of Chicago where life is inverted; into the fantastic inferno of a Utah mine enveloped by its dead aspic-like cold and

scarred by man-made ugliness and evil; and to the final setting of the disaster — the interior of a squalid rented cottage where the air is filled with the staling smell of cold gumbo on a cold stove,[4] and outside the black wind blows in from the sea over the dark sand through the dry wild clashing palms — symbolic of a furious sterility becoming death. For theirs is a love that carries its own seeds of death. What else can such a love be — a love that necessitates aborticide and denies the parental role? The lovers are but a suicidal force of a culture that is destroying itself. The very title of the work holds the clue. Primarily it takes its title from the first and ninth chapters of the novel, the richest in symbolic texture and organic structure, where the wild palms are woven into the background, atmosphere and meaning of the story. At first the dry wild clashing of the palm trees symbolizes a frenzied sterility, like that of the dry threshing bodies of the lovers; in the ninth chapter this symbol moves progressively from its meaning of sterility to approaching death to actual death and then to memory of death. Their love is sterility and death — destructive of self, destructive of the race. But the title suggests more variations on the same theme. The wild palms are also hands: the wild bitching hands of Charlotte and the erring inept hands of Harry, that succeed only in bringing death. Throughout the novel there is a constant implied contrast between Harry's hands and those of the tall convict. Harry's hands open tin cans and typewrite cheap stories and kill his woman and child; the convict's hands till the soil, fashion tools, kill to provide food, and deliver a child. Their hands are respective symbols of the middle-class and primitive cultures.

This examination, brief though it has been, leads naturally to a few tentative general conclusions. After 1936 Faulkner's involvement with his sick protagonists suffers a general decline. Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer remain in final analysis but cultural symbols; Faulkner is not fundamentally committed to them. In the work that follows *The Wild Palms* (1939) no sick protagonist appears, with the exception of Temple Drake and Gowan Stevens in *Requiem For a Nun*.[5] This fact might lead one to assume that some resolution

[4] In "Pantaloon in Black" and "The Fire and the Hearth" *(Go Down, Moses)*, the hearth in which a fire always burns symbolizes the family and home as the basic unit and source of life; in *The Sound and the Fury* the cold stove to which Dilsey returns after Easter service is part of a decaying house where family affection has died and Christ has not been resurrected.

[5] This work is curiously strained, manifesting an uneasy melodramatic quality that borders on hysteria. It seems best to leave this work out of the discussion.

of the tension within the author has taken place. "The Bear" appears to suggest such a resolution in Isaac's expiation of his patrimonial sin and in his attempt to draw a philosophical idealism out of his primitivism. I would, however, reject such an assumption on the grounds that primitivism in Faulkner's other work has exhibited neither a philosophical base nor a firm conviction, that it has functioned primarily as an unexamined idealization set against the sick protagonists and offering only a vague hope and a limited relief. "The Bear," it seems to me, is essentially an evasion, rather than a resolution, of the tension in Faulkner's work. In abandoning the sick protagonist and in moving to the expiating hero (Isaac McCaslin) and later to the adolescent hero (Charles Mallison) and to the philosopher-detective (Gavin Stevens), Faulkner is not headed, as it might appear, toward affirmation but is retreating from the tension that produced the very characters that represented his stake in life and that had tapped the rich source of his creative power. After "The Bear" a noticeable decline in the power and artistry of his work occurs. The later books have less poetic richness and emotional depth, are less sustained by firm aesthetic design and purpose.[6] Almost all of Faulkner's best work seems to be concentrated in the relatively short period beginning with *The Sound and the Fury* and ending with *Absalom, Absalom!* It is in this period that much of Faulkner's work is fraught with the leashed intensity which is so characteristic of his major novels and stories and which contributes to their enveloping power and submerged depths.

[6] The best of them, *The Hamlet* (1940), is an intensely imaginative comic novel, episodically constructed — some sections of it, in fact, being reworked from earlier magazine stories.

SHERMAN PAUL:

Jarrell's Defense of Poetry

RANDALL JARRELL: *Poetry and the Age. Knopf.*

Randall Jarrell is nowhere more eloquent, nowhere better proclaims the humanities that inform his best poems and that he feels should inform all poetry, than in his first collection of critical pieces. The unity of his one-man conference in defense of poetry is provided by the two long essays, "The Obscurity of the Poet" and "The Age of Criticism"; they seem to have guided him in the selection and revision of his criticism. For not all of Jarrell is here; his slashing reviews of lesser poets for the *Nation* have for the most part been left out. What is here, however, is exciting (to use the kind of critical term he again makes available) and daring because Jarrell takes the unavoidable risks he thinks a critic must; he is now trying to be a critic "who understands and cares for people and the world, instead of language and rhetoric and allusions, the rules and writers of the fashionable schools." This broadening of his critical point-of-view has followed, I think, from his growing confidence as a critic and from his concern for the place of poetry in our time.

Poetry is inevitable because it is human. "Poetry," he told the audience at Harvard that had come to see David slay Goliath, "does not need to be defended, any more than air or food needs to be defended. . . . Human life without some form of poetry is not human life. . . ." This is Jarrell's only apologia for it, and one reason, I suspect, why his contemporaries among the poets have rallied to review his volume. As Jarrell sees it, the neglect of poetry is just another instance of what Ortega called the revolt of the masses — another sign of the progressive dehumanization of our time. Obscurity and difficulty have nothing to do with it, but the "serious readers" and no-readers, who create the situation of the poet, have. Both treat him unfairly; neither uses him, in the phrase of Marianne Moore's that Jarrell takes for his refrain, for "accessibility to experience." Thus, though we have more good poets in America today than ever before, their occupation's gone. Someone may hear the poet howling in the wilderness and pity him; after all he is a poet. But Jarrell will not settle for that. Poets, great and small, here and now, need great audiences *for their poetry*. And when Whitman said great audiences, he assumed, where we cannot, that they could read.

Those among the no-readers with enough interest or sense of guilt to defend themselves insist that the poetry of the age is obscure and difficult; but *this,* as Jarrell nicely shows, is the obscurantism of people no longer able to read nor eager to read, of a culture so processed and packaged that it has made a value of insensitivity. He calls it "systematic unreceptiveness": no-readers refuse "to perceive, to enter, and to interpret those new worlds which new works of art are . . . ." Jarrell is not angry because his poems go unread, so do Homer's; the acerbity of his humorous treatment of his age, like his whole approach to literature, is moral. Insensitivity is not human.

The "serious reader" is of course the highbrow, and if what he reads measures his sensitivity to the primary world of people and things, how much better off

is the poet? For the serious reader is the new critic and those who quarter by quarter batten on him. "An age of criticism," Jarrell says, "is not an age of writing, nor an age of reading: it is an age of criticism. . . . I imagine, in gray hours, a generation which will have read a few masterpieces, a few thousand criticisms of these, and almost nothing else . . . ." That the new critics are good of their kind, Jarrell knows; they are probably his good friends and teachers. Though he never says so, I think he has in mind the second generation of new critics, those who have codified, formalized, and institutionalized the techniques of their masters. And it is their cultural proscriptions, their refusal to read widely and enthusiastically, their intellectualized game and their authority ("New critic is but old scholar writ large"), their vested interest in making reading a serious profession, that widen the gap in our culture. Unwillingly immured in their special journals, they have made of criticism a private world, a ritual, and a religion — all at the expense of poetry, or more perhaps at the expense of the relish for literature which alone can fill the gap. In many ways, Jarrell's stand is Whitman's: "Though it have all the learning and art of the schools if it have not life it is nothing."

Jarrell's critical writing, compared with that of the new critics, is (as he remarks of the criticism of the *Dial* and *Hound and Horn*) "endearingly amateurish and human and informal . . . ." He has purposively made it so, for he believes that "spiritual goods can be shared," that a critic is "an extremely good reader — one who has learned to show to others what he saw in what he read," that what is needed is a "human being for human beings." In the passage J. Donald Adams selected for his "Treasure Chest," Jarrell insists on the old truth we sometimes forget in our professional zeal, that stories and poems are "written by memory and desire, love and hatred, daydreams and nightmares — by a being, not a brain. But they are read just so, judged just so; and some great lack in human qualities is as fatal to the critic as it is to the novelist." So he will not be a formal critic, though at times he uses their instruments of analysis, and is not behind them in his display of learning (he leans toward music, philosophy, and Goethe). He will be the human critic.

All this may still seem strange to those who recall the bite of Jarrell's early criticism. As a judge of single poems and poets, he used to swing a sharp axe; we knew him for another cousin of Mr. Poe. He can still strike down those he considers second-rate, like Alex Comfort, Josephine Miles, and Muriel Rukeyser, and prune the first-rate, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Lowell. But he does so now from an awareness of the human requirements of poetry. "It is the way things are for us," he believes, "that has to matter to that witness of the actions of men, the poet." So he ranges the modern poets against the wisdom of "the last of the Old Ones, Goethe," and says that he is "saddened and frightened at how much the poet's scope has narrowed . . . ." What concern him more than the details of craft (though he can analyze them well when he wants to) are the territories of reality that poets have inhabited for themselves and staked out for us. However narrow and peculiar, like the worlds of John Crowe Ransom, Walter de la Mare, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop, so long as they are genuinely felt and honestly conveyed, he can cherish them and help us share them. He can say of Robert Lowell, for example: "Mr. Lowell's Catholicism represents effective realities of human behavior and desire, regardless of whether it is

true, false, or absurd . . . ." Of William Carlos Williams, he writes: "Williams' poetry is more remarkable for its empathy, sympathy, its muscular and emotional identification with its subjects, than any modern poetry except Rilke's." His fundamental test is "generosity and sympathy . . . . moral and human attractiveness."

This is the most significant emphasis in Jarrell's criticism. He has widened the bases of his criticism by including the moral world of the poet; and he is best as a critic in characterizing the relation of that moral world to the poems, most notably in his study of Robert Lowell. And if you judge a poet by his range and wisdom, how can you leave out Frost and Whitman? They are Unfashionables, of course, and it is a part of Jarrell's strategy to include them. But they are included also because of what they can do — Jarrell always weighs the accomplishment of those he admires more than their failures. When he gets through with them, incidentally using more new critical techniques here than anywhere else, one can only feel delight in the showman and the show: Whitman, for his verbal skills and "minute particulars"; Frost, for his hard wisdom, narratives, and people; both for their range and their wonder before man. He likes in Frost "that absorption into a subject that is prior even to affection"; and what accounts for his praise of Whitman is the fact "that few poets have shown more of the tears of things, and the joy of things, and of the reality beneath either tears or joy." Frost and Whitman are included, I think, for still another reason: they can do what no contemporary poet can, and what Jarrell apparently would like to see more poets do. He never says so explicitly, but it seems to me that he would like poetry to achieve the dramatic closeness to life that often comes from employing the narrative. He wants a poetry of particulars, of people and things. And this, perhaps, is the reason he feels that the later philosophic poetry of Wallace Stevens is less valuable than his earlier poetry of perceptions. (And it may have something to do with Jarrell's own excursion into the novel.)

Jarrell's prose is conversational; not many tight sentences, except in his "chronicles." All is open and easy, loose, informal, direct. He is always saying, "One smiles . . ." or "We are ashamed . . ." — always registering his feelings. (Such criticism, designed to provoke and share responses, would become, in unskillful hands, impressionistic.) A typical piece usually contains a list of the poet's best work; then, a sample or two (or three), not to be dissected, but to be admired — Jarrell is probably the only critic of repute who dares to write that "here I am not only left helpless to say whether this is slight or not, I don't even want to know . . . ." If space would permit he would merely point out all the good poems, list the good phrases, try on a few comparisons, and feel that he had done all that needs to be done. Sometimes he tells about the poet's early work and sketches his moral world; sometimes he ends with a picture. Always he displays as many poems as he can (he says that anthologizing is criticism: his lists and displays would make a superb, if limited, anthology of modern American verse). Always he writes an "appreciation," but one that has followed from "attention, submission, and astonished awe." It is all very effective, maybe high-handed, but it does turn one to the poems with more than an exegetical duty to perform. Here is enthusiasm without shame. Critics who know better than I have said that Jarrell is the best critic of poetry of his generation. Best or next best, he is certainly the most vigorous and willing spokesman for it.

CHARLES H. SHATTUCK:
The Humphrey Touch

WILLIAM HUMPHREY: *The Last Husband.* William Morrow & Co.

There was much delight in this office some five years ago over William Humphrey's first manuscript submission, "In Sickness and Health" (which turned out to be his first story in print). It was not in fact altogether a well-written story — clotted and thick with detail, hard to follow, at times shifty in point of view. But it was notable for comic energy — especially in the portrayal of Mr. Emmett Grogan, a mean little city Irishman probably in his last illness, and his enormous unquenchable Viennese wife lording it over him and cheering on his dissolution. Given the subject of these ugly hostile bodies, given the idiomatic freedom of German and especially Irish speech, Mr. Humphrey had built up a wonderful hilaro-tragic tension, and had let fly whole clusters of apt and ludicrous metaphors.

> Mr. Grogan's bald head broke unexpectedly through the covers like a stone heaved up by a hard frost. An eye thawed open and he experimented with his nose; it rattled like steam pipes warming up . . . He could hear his wife down below walloping up his breakfast. . . . She grinned, and when he opened his mouth to remonstrate she drew a concealed thermometer and poked it in him as if she wanted to see how full from the bottom he was. . . . She began to rock herself contentedly, her generous liquids swishing in her like a churn. . . . He might have been a teapot in a cozy, he told himself, while the yellowed old teeth danced in his mouth like popcorn in a pan.

The story abounds in these astonishments, but I don't mean to suggest that it is merely a series of gags. It is a dead earnest reckoning of lovelessness and encroaching death, in which such lines function Dickens-wise as grotesque punctuation marks. Whatever its imperfections, it demanded to be printed. I must add that in preparing it for inclusion in his volume of short stories, Mr. Humphrey has greatly improved it by cutting a sixth of its length and all its original excesses and uncertainties.

His second story, "The Hardys," which is certainly one of his very best, appeared soon after in the *Sewanee.* Here again the subject is a married couple at the end of life, but the makings and the blend are more subtle. Mr. Hardy and his second wife Clara, Texas farmers, are breaking up their home, preparing their effects for public auction, moving to town to live with their various adult sons and daughters. The relationship between them is a sort of "second love," a considerate endurance, a long-habituated accommodation to each other's weaknesses and needs. During the nerve-wracking day of rummaging and price-tagging which makes up the story, the old man remembers more and more about his first wife Virgie, "who had died young," until he can hardly bear to look at the woman beside him "stooped and worn with years of work and sickness, no teeth of her own, a thing that could never have been young." And as for Clara,

> She rocked her head in her hands and wondered would all this misery never end. She thought of Virgie, safe in Heaven these fifty years, safe in Mr. Hardy's mind, forever young and pretty. Surely, she thought, shuffling a finger across her withered lips, surely when the Lord called you you didn't have to come as you were. What else could Hell be?

The pathos of "The Hardys" is extremely well-calculated, generating from detailed realism of scene, thought, and behavior, and being relieved and heightened too by the same bold comedy of metaphor which was so remarkable in his first story.

About the end of 1949, when those of us who were watching his work began to feel that we "knew the Humphrey touch," rather suddenly he slipped the halter and ran off in quite another direction. Or perhaps I should say "in all directions." This was a costly thing to do. At the same time, if he was going to amount to anything as a writer, it was an essential thing to do. Just at the point when he might have consolidated his jocular verbal tricks and made a lot of money and become the proud possessor of "a style of his own" — another Ring Lardner, or Jesse Stuart, or little Dickens if you please — he threw metaphor out the window. In the texture of his latest work one can see he would rather be caught dead than resort to a "like" or "as if" construction. The subject and the story are the thing, and the style must grow from them — cannot be imposed by the author's wit, however handy its flashing intuitions might be. The costs are obvious. His stories, taken all together, lack the homogeneity which his first two or three stories promised. When the subject is flawed the result is flawed. When he doesn't know his subject well enough, the sterility cannot be concealed.

Two of his most ambitious recent pieces are cases in point. "The Fauve" is an account of the final humiliation of a third-rate painter in a permanent artists' colony. This is brought about through the obvious irony — taken from life perhaps, but nonetheless heavy-handed — of his own work being banned from the local gallery while his wife's work, which he despises, takes a major money prize. Now there are fine touches in the story, particularly in the character of the wife, but the painter himself and the fable about him are to these nostrils very much "of the lamp." Anyone could have written it, and I almost wish someone else had. The title story, "The Last Husband," which is a novel *manqué,* is more rewarding but also problematic. It records drily the Dionysia of the suburban commuters, those incredible half-legendary waterflies of the world of advertising and radio-television, overpaid and neurotic, scrambling after sex whether they need it or not, predatory and cornuted, leaping hysterically from club-car to station-wagon to each other's bedrooms to bars, complaining about taxes, and expiating their sins by growing the biggest-ever-heard-of tomatoes on their futile mountain-sides with the aid of the most expensive commercial fertilizers (or angle-worms) ever developed. It's a fine subject for a wild satire, and Mr. Humphrey seems to know about it first-hand, and he succeeds in creating something as prankish — if not quite so naughty — as a comedy by Dryden or Farquhar. Yet, structurally, there are flaws in it: the whole role of the narrator (not to mention his offstage wife and father-in-law) is unrealized, a hole of disbelief such as is not allowable in a good short story.

The principal achievements of Mr. Humphrey's self-imposed and admirable honesty are so far to be measured best in certain shorter sketch-like pieces: in

"A Fresh Snow," the gentle pathos of a Texas war-bride parted from her family and living in a wintry, impersonal northern city; in "Sister," the charm of an eccentric child who dominates an entire suburban household by her love of cats; in "Quail for Mr. Forester," the wryly humorous reflection of southerners clinging to the Old South; in "The Shell," the very simple and very beautiful styling of sentences about the old theme of a boy and a gun and a dog. None of these is a "great story," final or definitive, but in every one of them Mr. Humphrey successfully explores the reaches of the art of prose.

His finest major story to date is one of his earlier ones, called "Man with a Family." The reader may be put off it at first if he is usually put off by tall tales. But this is a particularly human tall tale, and it is also a tragedy of fate. The hero is a Texas farmer who is victimized by nature and machinery. He lacerates a hand, breaks a leg, forfeits his wife's washing machine, loses his crops and his tenancy, loses his wife's love and his son's respect, and dies under the blades of his father-in-law's mowing machine. His only philosophy is, "I probably have it all coming to me." It is very sad and very funny, and it grows with every reading. This one *is* final.

RICHARD EBERHART:

Into Eliot Country

GEORGE WILLIAMSON: *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot.* The Noonday Press.

Mr. Williamson's book is built to be read with *The Complete Poems and Plays* of T. S. Eliot, recently published, and has a special value for that reason. New students of Eliot will prosper in its care. Old, critic-flavored Eliot readers will consider it a salutory effort of elucidation. It is the best new Baedecker and map of the Eliot terrain, spiritual and otherwise, to appear recently. It has a Baedecker sort of limitation, but any reader will be able to find his way around in Eliot country with its use.

Other critics, among them Elizabeth Drew, have written recent books on Eliot with special provocative slants (in her case, for instance, a predilection for Jung) and with speculative and microscopic fortifications unlike those elected by Mr. Williamson (Miss Drew goes into some of the poems compendiously, almost exhaustively).

Mr. Williamson has been considering T. S. Eliot for twenty-four years between books. His *The Talent of T. S. Eliot* was remarkable in its early day, 1929. It opened the doors for many. It placed Eliot in the Donne tradition and it talked generally, if not at length, about "The Waste Land." Mr. Williamson has grown in the interim in perception, in comprehension, in clarity and niceness of judgment, and has improved his style, which is now mature and supple.

His scope is modest and practical. He says in his Introduction, "No attempt has been made to give full readings or analyses of the poems; nor to recover all the borrowings or erudition of the poet; only to offer some guidance to the evident but not obvious pattern of the poems, at most to chart their course. The intention is not to try to state what a poem ultimately means, but what

it is about, or the terms in which it is developed." This is certainly a sensible program for such a book as this.

Within his stated scope Mr. Williamson accomplishes a great deal. He always helps his readers to sympathetic understanding of the work at hand. He is especially good on "Prufrock" and "The Waste Land." He brings into unusual prominence certain poems, such as "Dans le Restaurant" and is apt in showing how certain poems, sections of poems, or ideas ramify through time and future works of Eliot. He is resolute about epigraphs, shows the significance of each, with translations, to the full delight of students and teachers alike, I should think.

The nature of *Four Quartets* makes his writing on them less penetrable than on other poems. He misses a chance, among the Minor Poems, on "New Hampshire" and "Virginia." The rhythm of the former is most particular. Eliot's voice in saying it betrays an emotion hardly disclosed elsewhere, especially in the last line. The originality of this poem has been missed by Mr. Williamson, although he refers to it once.

It is no disparagement or discredit to Mr. Williamson to say that poetry must be read with spiritual affinity, not with criticism. Only then will it be known. There is no substitute for the most personal reading of Eliot's poems. As a helpful critical aid to comprehension, this book sharpens the mind; its focus is deep in field. It enriches the poetry after its richness is known. It clarifies and it indicates.

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